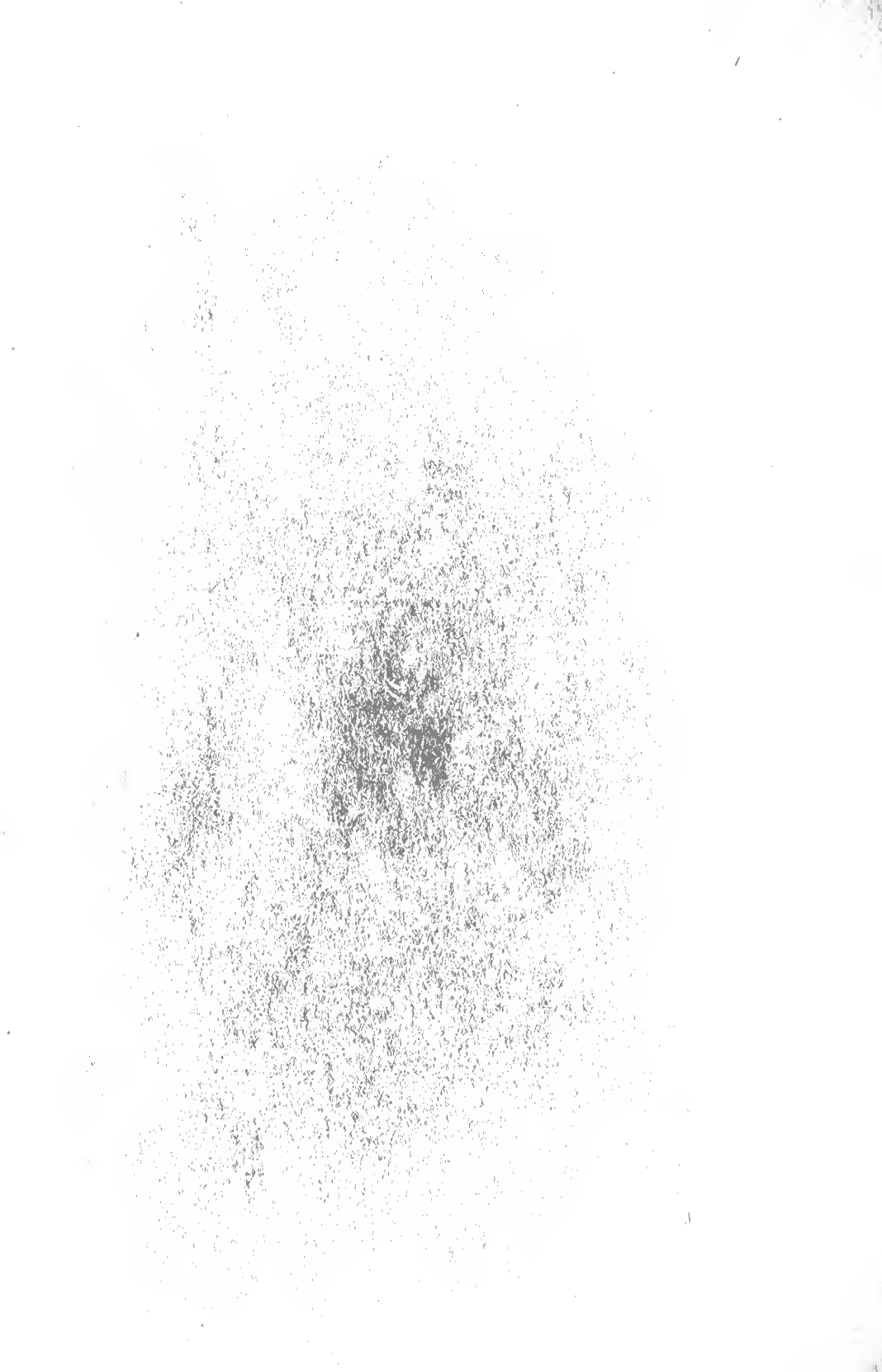


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The Story of  
Reading Government

by

Victor E. Pitkin

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## P R E F A C E

The last few years have been ones of world turmoil. Everywhere we hear evaluations of democracy. Some are favorable and some are not. One of the constant criticisms of democracy is the lack of interest which people take in their government, particularly their local government.

I, for one, hold the belief that if democracy is to survive, it must be saved in the local community rather than in far-away Washington. It is in the local community that government most affects us in our daily life. Too many people simply do not have the knowledge and understanding of what is happening in local government today. Some means must be taken to inform them.

This booklet was written for the purpose of informing young people in public schools as to the machinery of our local government. It is not intended to be a complete manual of Reading government. It does, I hope, tell the story of how we got this way and what we are like today.

The booklet is divided into two parts. The first part is the historical development of Reading government and affairs as they reflected the life of the people. The second part is an account of how our government is actually carried on today.

Aside from informing young people how our government is carried on, this book attempts to do two other things. First, it attempts to develop pride in young people for the many hard years of sacrifice and effort that our forbears have given to us. Second, it tries to instill into our young people the notion that if town government is to succeed it must have men of outstanding ability and character. It must have men seek public office who have a true sense of civic spirit and interest

in public affairs, an interest which must be for the good of the town as a whole and not for one specific part.

Finally, this booklet could not have been written were it not for the fine co-operation of the many town officials who have helped me with it. The list is long—too long to give here. I have secured a great deal of information by personal interview, other information by reading the town history or the state laws. To all of those who have helped me I give my hearty thanks. I am also indebted to Mr. Clinton Bancroft for checking the historical accuracy of Part One, and to Mr. Neil Robinson and Dr. and Mrs. Elbridge Grover for proof reading.

In addition I am indebted to Mr. Leon Bent and Mr. Theodore Berle for advice and help on obtaining materials.

Victor E. Pitkin

Reading, Massachusetts.  
October 1, 1940.

The Story of  
Reading Government



## *Chapter One*

### *The Beginning*

"It is ordered that Linn Village at the request of the inhabitants thereof shall be called Redding." May 29, 1644.

Records of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

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A gull soared lazily above the beaches of Lynn. His keen eyes watched the strange human beings who were feverishly and primitively trying to build rough cabins and places of shelter. The eyes of the gull turned for a moment inland. As far as he could see were vast acres of practically untouched land. In the cool of the evening as lengthening shadows darkened the land he could hear the plaintive cry of wolves. The campfires of the newly arrived settlers began to grow brighter as darkness deepened. The gull soared away to rest in his nest. Night settled down.

It was the year 1638—three hundred and more years ago—that a small group of settlers met in a cabin. We don't know whose cabin it was. It may have been any one of several, but let us go back through the ages of time and catch the conversation as we might imagine it to have been.

"I'll tell ye, Brother Cowdry, that we can never make anything staying along the shores of these beaches," said Thomas Parker.

"Do you know of any place better?" asked a Richard Walker.

"Yes," answered Thomas, "a few of us have taken short trips into the woods looking for more desirable lands. One day we followed along the Saugus River and reached its headwaters about twelve miles inland. There is a good sized pond there with a small clearing on the south shore that the Indians must have made. It would make a fine beginning for a new colony."

"It sounds to me like it would be quite a distance from the rest of the colony. We would be exposed to the Indians, and our animals to the wolves," remarked Sergeant Marshall, "but nevertheless, I am willing to go and look it over."

"It would appear to me that all of the really desirable lands in the Linn settlement have been given out. If we hope to get any decent land for ourselves we must look elsewhere. I think it the only wise thing to do," added William Cowdry.

"Yes, let's go again and view the land—the four of us."

So it was that these men, and perhaps others, ventured into the wilderness to look over more carefully the prospects of settlement. Was the soil good? Would there be plentiful supplies of fresh drinking water? Would there be fish to catch and deer to kill to provide meat until the farms were established? Would they be safe from the Indians? Such were the questions they considered.

Several months later the Governor and Assistants of the Massachusetts Bay Colony received a petition from some of the inhabitants of "Linn" to be granted some land in the wilderness. The grant of land to be known as Linn Village was made in 1639. Shortly after, additional land was granted. Finally, about twenty years later, a third grant was given north of the Ipswich River.

It was after the second grant that the settlers petitioned for a separate town. The very words which the official records of the Massachusetts Bay Colony used to grant the petition follow:

"It is ordered that Linn Village at the request of the inhabitants thereof shall be called Redding."

What was this place called "Redding"? It was a piece of land four miles square and included lands that we know today as Reading and Wakefield. Settlers had been gradually coming here to take up lands for about four or five years. Most of these early settlements were along the south shore of the lake, known to us as Quannapowitt. The settlers found here a few cleared or

burned-over acres of land and established their first cabins. The remainder was but a part of the great wilderness. It was certain, however, that by 1644 several crude houses had been built and that the settlement would survive.

### *The First Town Meeting of Reading*

The first town meeting of Reading may have been held in the Meeting House (the church), or it may have been held in one of the cabins of the settlers. The records are silent as to which. The settlers, one and all, gathered for their first meeting. In our imagination let us try to catch the drift of it. The meeting opened with a prayer. Someone, perhaps William Cowdry, acted as a moderator.

"By God's grace we have come to these lands and by His grace and kind guidance we have been able to clear enough land and get our homes established. The time has now come to make further allotments of land. Here are the strips of the common land granted by the Massachusetts Bay Colony which may well be divided at this time. How shall we proceed?" he said.

"The land should all be divided equally," someone volunteered.

"How much land is there to be divided?" asked another.

"I suggest," said another, "that we give all the voting members ten acres of land, and all of those unable to vote five acres of land."

The final decision in the matter was reached after some discussion. The meeting then proceeded to divide up the common land. Different amounts were given to different people. Then:

"Brother Cowdry."

"Yes, Brother Poole."

"I should like permission to build a grist mill on the brook draining out of the small pond. I could grind all the grists of corn and other grains, and be a great help to the community. As it is now, we must take our grists to Linn to be ground, and haul the flour back again."

"What do the Brothers think of that?" asked the Moderator.

"Yes, yes. Let him do it," was the reply from several.

"I shall need the right to build a channel for water to run the water wheel, and I shall need the right to cut some trees to build a mill," Mr. Poole reminded them.

"What say you, men, shall we grant it?" asked the Moderator.

"Yes, upon condition that he promises to do our work of grinding when we wish it done," answered someone and others nodded in agreement.

"I will agree to spend at least two days of each week grinding grist for the members of the settlement," said John Poole, "but I must have some free time to work my own land and care for my own crops and cattle. Further, I believe that I should be protected against anyone else building a mill and taking my business away."

"What do the others of you think about that?" asked the Moderator.

After some discussion they agreed to permit John Poole to have a grist mill for grinding grain, upon condition that he operate it at least two days a week for them. He was granted the right to build a channel from the pond to the site of his mill to get water for the water wheel, and to cut down trees to build the mill.

Thus, in imagination, was this first meeting possibly conducted. We do know from the official records that was the business which was discussed, but we do not know who acted as Moderator. The conversation is imaginary.

Thus, we learn how our first town meeting granted some land and gave a permit to build a grist mill. There is no record of any other town meeting until nearly three years later. We may assume that the men settled their affairs by talking matters over with each other after church, or as they passed by one another in their daily work. At this period, most of their attention was given to conquering the forests by clearing land, planting crops, and securing a living.



## *Chapter Two*

### *Early Settlement*

It is almost impossible today to picture what the very early Reading lands were like. Early in 1639 the first settlers arrived after a long trudge through the woods from the distant settlements at Lynn. There was little to see except solid areas of forests, broken here and there by bits of clearings and by the Great Pond. Had one climbed then to the top of Bare Hill, as far as one could see would have been virgin forests of oak, pine, ash, and other trees. Had one looked sharply among the tree leaves one might have seen the sparkling water of Lake Quannapowitt, the Great Pond, from the lower end of which came the Saugus River.

It was on the southern and eastern shores of this lake that the very first settlers raised their cabins, and cleared land for their farms. It was more than forty years before any settlements were made in Wood End, the part that we today call Reading.

It will be well right now to get straight the various names of the different parts of the town. The first Reading settlements were in what is now Wakefield. It was later known as the First Parish, because it was there the first church was built. When this First Parish separated from the rest of the town, it was called South Reading, and still later changed to Wakefield.

The early name for present Reading was Wood End. It was also referred to as the West End, the Third Parish, and Reading. The part today known as North Reading was early referred to as the Second Parish.

Certainly for the first fifty years or more any mention of Reading referred to people living around the shores of Lake Quannapowitt, which is Wakefield. Reading from 1812 to 1853 included present Reading and North Reading. Since 1853 the present boundaries have been approximately as we now know them.

Yes, the first settlers secured the right from the mother company, the Massachusetts Bay Company, to establish and build a settlement at "Redding". Slowly

but surely pioneers began to come to this tiny settlement and take up their abode. In about twenty years—1661—the settlement was granted two miles square of additional lands north of the Ipswich River, destined to become the Second Parish, or North Reading, as previously referred to.

### *Social and Economic Life of Early Settlers*

Reading was settled by men of strong will and a firm belief in God. Most of the settlers were earnest and very hard workers. These people had few comforts. They cleared the lands and built the cabins with their bare hands, axes, and perhaps oxen. Fires, once started with a flint, were kept going constantly for there were no matches. There were almost no spices. Food consisted mostly of things made from corn meal, and perhaps some wheat flour. There was a plentiful supply of fish and meat from neighboring forests and streams. Wild fruit and apples were plentiful. They made cider, and there are many records of public payments for wine and rum, though it is doubtful if men were often drunk.

The life of women was doubly hard. It was work from morn until night preparing food, carding wool, spinning, knitting, making yeast, and fashioning clothes to wear. The great sin for women was scolding their husbands, for which they could be publicly ducked in a pond. There are records of some being so punished. The wife of the first settler in Wood End had fifteen children.

No, life was not easy. It was long, bitter and solitary, but earnest. There may have been some complaining, but for the most part they all knew that they had left the Old World for good and had come to the New World to start anew. Furthermore, after the first fifty years there came a generation of people who were born here, and who had never known any life but that of the pioneer. They, too, accepted their lot in life and made the best of it. It was these people who founded our community. For all their faults we may be proud of them. We could have done no better.

In the early days the church was a very important part of the life of the people. There was but one church

and everyone went there. In fact they were fined if they failed to attend. Catholics and Quakers were not allowed to settle in many of the early Massachusetts towns, though there is no record of such a refusal in Reading. This was a strange situation for Massachusetts, considering that these people came here for religious freedom—among other things.

### *Separation of Reading and Wakefield*

The question of going to church was the cause of one of the early differences of opinion between the various sections of the town. As the years went on, settlers began to open up lands in Wood End, and north of the Ipswich River. The Wood End settlers were quite numerous and they began to grumble somewhat about going four miles on the bumpy road around the lake. One can easily sympathize with them, trudging four miles each Sunday whether or not the wind was blowing, or the rain and snow were pelting. And they were very regular in their attendance. They had to be for the law provided that every person must go to church.

Finally, in 1713 the people in the lands north of the Ipswich asked to have a separate church. Later in 1769 a separate church—the Third Parish—was established in Wood End. The first church in Wood End was built on the present Common and today one may go there and find a stone marker on the site. The church was built in the year 1770. The establishment of these churches was the first step in creating a different set of interests in the three parts of the town.

The years passed by and Reading prospered. (When we say Reading don't forget that in these early days we mean all the land now included in Wakefield, Reading and North Reading.) The colonists continued to hold their meetings to carry on their local governmental affairs. The Revolutionary War came and went, and when it was past we were no longer owing allegiance to the King of England, but to the United States—the thirteen original colonies.

The years from 1800 to 1815 brought about a definite change in outlook between the people of our part of the town and the people of the Wakefield section.

The people in the Wood End and north of the Ipswich River were quite different in their viewpoints toward politics and business than were the people of the South Parish—Wakefield.

There were many causes for these differences. For one thing, we in our part of town had a different pastor than those in the South Parish. We must not forget that the views of the minister played an important part in those days. His influence was very great. Then, too, the Wakefield section was made up more of people of the mechanic and worker type of person, and less of the farmer type than was the Reading section. The Wakefield people were more in sympathy with the politics of the Democratic-Republican party of Thomas Jefferson, and had little sympathy for the Federalist viewpoint. Reading was just the opposite. The importance of politics is realized when we know that in thirty years previous to separation there were only two representatives sent to the General Court from the South Parish part of town. They were Federalists who were elected for the most part by votes from Wood End.

One thing led to another. People in the South Parish began to ask the General Court for legislation to be separated from Reading. On February 25, 1812 South Reading was set off from the rest of the town. For a long time it was called South Reading, but it finally changed its name to Wakefield.

So, our "Mother" town, from the point of view of first settlement, separated from the young child of Wood End. But it was the young child that kept the family name, and has ever since carried it.

Just one final thing to show the differences in point of view. Recall that they separated about as the war of 1812 was to start with England. On March 5, 1812 South Reading voted to raise men and equipment and to meet the enemy without loss of time. In a meeting held in Reading the men voted on the question of whether or not there should be support for a war with England. Not a man voted for the support!

At the time of separation of the two towns, South Reading had about 800 inhabitants. The remainder of

Reading had about 1,500 inhabitants. Remember, this included both the North Reading and Reading villages.

### *The Early Development of Business and Industry*

The fifty year period after the separation of South Reading from Reading was one of great importance to Reading history. It was important because it was in this period that Reading really began to grow. Through this growth we may gain an appreciation of the interests and problems of people living at that time.

In order to understand these developments, let's picture Reading as it was about 1815, three years after separation. Standing just below the Reading Common at about the corner of present Haven and Main Street, we face north toward Andover. Directly in front of us is the first church built in our part of the town—the church of the Third Parish. At the left, (where the library is now) is the home of the minister. There are a few scattered houses along the Salem road. Lowell, Salem and Woburn Streets are just dirt roads suitable for wagon or ox carts. Connecting Lowell and Salem streets is a bridle path which crosses back of the church.

Looking around a bit we find almost unbroken stretches of farm land on each side of us. Here and there stand a few houses of our early townspeople. All the land around Haven and Green streets is farm lands, and these stretch out into woodlands and pastures on the west side of Summer Avenue—only there was no Summer Avenue then. There are no houses around High street and Bancroft avenue section—simply farm land. No railroad has yet touched Reading. It is primarily a farming community. Reading (including North Reading then) has only about 1500 inhabitants. The twelve miles to Boston is yet a long way to travel.

Homes in those days supplied most of their own needs, even as in still earlier times. Every man planted his corn and grains for grinding into flour. Cattle and hogs wandered about common lands or private pastures. From these animals the townspeople secured their meat, lard, sausage, leather and tallow. From the sheep came wool which was cleansed, combed, carded, and spun

into yarn or woven into cloth by the women folks within the home. Nearby woods furnished hemlock trees from which one could make tanning to cure the leather to be made into shoes and harnesses.

It is such common practice today to go to the store when one wants something that we can scarcely imagine life without stores. By 1815 Reading had a store but it sold mostly yard goods, sugar, spices, molasses, and a few things of that nature. Money was not as yet plentiful and often people swapped things as a means of trade.

There were a few skilled craftsmen in town. There was a shoemaker, several good cabinet makers, at least one blacksmith, and perhaps others. The blacksmith not only shod horses but made shovels, wagons, axes, hoes, and other necessary tools. There were two taverns in town where overnight travellers could put up, or other people could secure a glass of ale. There were also two grist mills.

Every Sunday saw strict observance of the day. Every one in the family attended services which were often long and scholarly. The pews were straight and stiff, and there was little heat for warmth in the winter. Most families had their warming stones on which to rest cold feet. The women sat on one side of the church and the men on the other.

The social and economic life of the people was hard even after more than a hundred years of settlement. Yet, from and through these hardships, the young and old alike worked together to make our town and our nation what it is today. We may doubt if people as a whole now have as much interest in their community affairs as did these people. We owe much to them for their perseverance and for the downright common sense with which they attacked the problems of their times. It is they who laid the foundation upon which our town has been built. They carried on.

Such was life in Reading about the year 1815.

### *The Middlesex Canal*

Among the many things which must have been of interest to these people was the question of building a

canal. What canal? The Middlesex Canal which was to connect Boston with Lowell. Business men in Boston were somewhat afraid that the business from New Hampshire and Vermont would go down the Merrimack River to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. They feared that city would receive the benefit of trade and commerce rather than Boston. The Boston business men wanted to prevent this. If only some way could be had to tap the Merrimack River and bring this produce to Boston, it would insure the Bostonian merchants of that trade. Thus, it was proposed to build a canal from Boston to Lowell, tapping the Merrimack there.

One can imagine many fathers telling their children about going over to Billerica to watch the work, or perhaps even to work on the project. The canal did not pass directly through Reading, and few Reading men were ever directly employed. The canal was completed in 1803. "It was 27 miles long and ran through the woods and fields and rose 107 feet above sea level by 27 locks until it reached the Concord River at North Billerica, and then by 3 locks it dropped 21 feet to the Merrimack River just above the big falls in Lowell—then Chelmsford. It was 4 feet deep and 30 feet wide, and could take a boat bearing 24 tons over the trip in twelve hours."\* One may still see the remains of this interesting project on the road through Winchester, Woburn and Billerica. This canal made it possible to put goods on a boat at Boston and go to Lowell, and then once on the Merrimack the boat could continue on seventy-five miles as far as Concord, New Hampshire. An interesting venture, but one which in a few years was out of date—put out by the railroads, and this canal carried the first engine to Lowell to run on the very railroad that was soon to put the canal in financial bankruptcy.

### *The Andover Turnpike*

Or perhaps there was gossip concerning the turnpike! Reading in 1803 voted in town meeting to oppose all turnpike roads through the town. Some of the leaders in town affairs evidently saw what would soon hap-

\*Horace T. Wadlin: Articles in the Reading Chronicle.

pen to Reading if it long remained off a main artery of traffic. Two years later, 1805, the town voted to have a committee appointed to promote a turnpike road leading from Andover to Malden. Why the change?

The Newburyport turnpike was completed and provided a daily mail to all the towns along the way from Boston. It brought numerous business visitors to taverns and inns. It provided life, news, gossip, and business to all the towns on the line. Reading would soon become a back number unless she could secure a main road through the town.

So it was that a turnpike company was chartered, and it built the turnpike almost as we know it today from Andover to Reading, Stoneham, and Medford where it connected with an earlier turnpike to Boston.

"The turnpikes were chiefly dirt roads with side ditches. Sometimes gravel was brought for surfacing. There was no road machinery, nor factory made shovels or picks. Rude tools wrought by local blacksmiths were used. Ledges were blasted out by using hand drills and splitting rocks. Nearby farmers did the work with their few carts drawn by horses and oxen. The turnpike was opened in 1807."\*

It is interesting to note that as a financial venture this, too, was a failure. People who invested money in the company never got it back. Money was earned on the roads by the payment of a toll. At frequent intervals there was a toll bridge or a toll gate. If one wanted to use the turnpike one paid a small fee and could go as far as the next gate. The cause of the failure was the rise in free roads, paid for by state and town taxes, so that few of the local people used the turnpikes. Instead, they went the "back way" on the free roads.

Between 1835 and 1840 the Andover turnpike became a free road—taken over by the state. It had been put out of business by other free roads. It is this same turnpike enlarged, straightened in places, and cemented which provides the town of Reading with many perplexing traffic problems today.

\*Horace T. Wadlin: Articles in the Reading Chronicle.



## *Reading Gets A Railroad*

What interesting tales the travellers of these early highways and canals could tell us. But they were as nothing compared to the early gossip which must have travelled from family to family concerning the railroad.

To begin with, there was the plan of one Gridley Bryant to bring granite from the Quincy quarries over a set of rails in cars drawn by horses to make Bunker Hill monument. One must realize that there were no good roads then and to transport heavy goods like granite meant to get bogged down in mudholes every little while. At first many ridiculed the idea of Bryant's, but he finally succeeded in getting it accepted. It was the first "rail" way in America, being made of wood rails strapped together by pieces of strap iron. The rails were laid across pieces of stones. There were turntables and switches, now commonly accepted for railroads. But no railroads! Not yet!

Time passed on. In the year 1831 charters were given by the state legislature to companies to build railroads from Boston to Lowell, and from Worcester to Providence. By 1834 the first locomotive in Massachusetts was in operation on the Worcester-Boston road. A year later trains were running from Boston to Lowell. The first engine to be used on the Boston and Lowell road was imported from England to Boston, along with an engineer to run it. They were placed aboard a barge on the Middlesex Canal and taken to Lowell. Thus the canal was the means of carrying the first locomotive which in turn was the means of putting the canal out of business.

A railroad company was given a charter to run from East Boston to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a coastal line. A branch line was chartered to run off the Boston-Lowell line, going to Wilmington and to Andover. As yet none came to Reading. It seemed that Reading was about to go without the benefit of railroads. But we reckon without the courage of three Reading men.

The story of Reading gaining a place on the railroad map is an interesting one. It begins in Haverhill.

Citizens in Haverhill had a charter to complete the railroad that ran from Wilmington to Andover to Haverhill. This group, known as the Boston and Maine, applied for a charter to build a railroad from Andover to Boston without going over the Wilmington line to Lowell. This was in 1844. Through what towns should this road go? Through Woburn, or through Reading?

It is said that three Reading men, William R. Perkins, Stephan Foster, and Sylvester Harnden, realized the importance of a railroad to the town. They quickly went to Haverhill and met the leaders of the Boston and Maine organization and convinced them it would be a wiser investment to run the road through Reading, South Reading, Melrose and to Malden. The Reading men were told to present a survey of their plans. They immediately solicited money from other townspeople and supplied more of their own and had a survey made. The results proved favorable. When the question of granting the exact location of the road came up in legislature enough pressure was used by representatives from Reading and other towns on the route to have the road chartered to go as it now does.

The first train ran over the road through Reading July 1, 1845. Another milestone in the development of Reading had been passed. Reading became an important station, because, being about twelve miles out of Boston it was a convenient place to refuel with water and wood. It was made the end of the suburban service, and has so remained to this day.

### *Differences Over Religion*

As the years passed on many changes came and went, most of them forgotten. People of today have forgotten the great religious questions of a hundred years ago.

When the settlers first came there was comparatively little difference in respect to the interpretation of the Bible and of religious beliefs. Beginning about 1800 there was a wide movement going over all New England and other states over the merits of different ideas about religion. It was the time the various Protestant

churches split up into many groups—the Congregationalists, the Baptists, the Unitarians, the Methodists, etc.

Reading, like all other towns affected, was the home of many a long and earnest discussion—conducted at times with more heat and emotion than clearness and sanity. But to those who passed through and took part in these movements it was a very real issue. There are many cases where whole families were bitterly torn apart because of their views. Today the scars of these quarrels are pretty well healed and few people even know of the former feuds.

### *Industries Before The Civil War*

By 1855 Reading had 13 establishments manufacturing chair and cabinet work, employing 179 men and producing furniture worth over \$200,000 annually. Many fine desks, bureaus, and other similar household items were made by Reading craftsmen. Ice boxes were also made here—refrigerators to the modern generation! Curiously, many of these were shipped by boat to the South, where they were filled with ice, also taken from Maine. The Civil War later wiped out this trade.

There were 41 boot and shoe shops in Reading making nearly \$200,000 worth of goods annually, and they employed some 654 men in 1855. Then, too, there were shops making organ pipes, men's clothing, sawing lumber, and many carpenters were employed in the building trades.

An earlier industry was the making of clocks. These clocks were fine time pieces. They were carried all over the country by the "tin" pedlar and his cart. A recent traveller to Wiscasset, Maine found one in the railroad station there still ticking away the minutes as accurately as during the first years of its long life. The industry passed away with the death of the two men who founded it, Daniel Pratt and Johnathan Frost.

So it was that railroads and turnpikes brought changes. No longer was farming the only important occupation. New industries, and new machinery were making their ways felt in our growing town. These changes affected us more than they did our neighboring parish.

## *Separation of North Reading from Reading*

Another important event was the separation from Reading of North Reading. This was accomplished because of differences in the development of the two villages.

Reading was now tied to Boston by rail. It was developing small factories and a life more directly tied up with commerce and industry. The residents north of the Ipswich River were remaining primarily agricultural.

Reading was a town consisting of two villages, one centering in Reading as we know it today, and the other at North Reading. Town meetings would be held first in one village, and then in the other, finally entirely in Reading. Thus, the people of one village always had to travel four miles to attend the meetings in the other village, an inconvenience not to be taken lightly in those days without cars and buses. A high school could not be built. If it were placed in either village the other would be without it. People in Reading were beginning to want improvements in streets and other things which cost money. Residents north of the Ipswich were willing to do without these improvements, but if the question were put in town meeting they would be outvoted by members of Reading village. The result was our northern residents still had to pay taxes for improvements from which they received no benefit and against which they had voted.

Finally, the northern residents petitioned the legislature to be set off as a separate town. The legislature granted this permission. Peacefully and quietly North Reading legally departed in March, 1853.

Since that time Reading has remained practically as we know it today. The original Reading, consisting of lands four miles square at the headwaters of the Saugus, and added to by a two mile grant of lands north of the Ipswich, has been settled; it has grown, and finally it has separated into three parts. So it is that many of our early town traditions are shared by those of our sister towns of Wakefield and of North Reading. It is less

than a hundred years that we have been making our way alone, but even in our differences we had and still have much in common.

### *Later Events*

No sooner had our local affairs been again put in order than the national storm, which had long been brewing, broke out. The Civil War vitally affected life here in Reading. Men enlisted. The town voted money at town meetings to support them. We were solidly behind Lincoln. In time this terrible disaster passed on. It ruined many Reading business men, who having customers in the South could not collect their bills and were forced into bankruptcy. Industry in many parts of the North had expanded, but in Reading it declined greatly.

Following the Civil War business again revived and expanded here. New ideas came to town. Neckties were made; a stove foundry was set up; organs as well as organ pipes were made; the "rubber" shop was established; stores began to develop, at first only local merchants but more recently the chain stores; garages and gasoline stations have rapidly increased; and a new product by the Ace Art has recently established itself here.

Some of the old industries passed on. Saw mills, once buzzing and occupying a prominent place near the center of town, have long since gone. Grist mills no longer run and grind the flour for our local needs. The shoe factories have closed down as have many of the cabinet making shops. Reading today is no longer the busy little shop and farming town that it was before the Civil War, and in some respects after the war until about 1890. It slowly but surely became a residential town.

Streets were laid out in increasing number. Houses were built. People began to commute to Boston, Lawrence and other places to work. Reading gradually became a suburban town. Farming slowly but surely disappeared.

But wait—new hopes, new opportunities beckon elsewhere. The great West is opening up. Just how many went West before and after the Civil War we do not know, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that many left this town to heed the alluring call to that section of the nation. It would be interesting to know just how many went on that journey from Reading, but the records are silent.

Electricity came to town in 1894 followed by street cars. What changes this brought in our daily lives! Gas, too, saw a steady increase in use. Finally, the automobile arrived. With it came other machines and an increasing concentration of living outside the main factory towns. Reading grew by leaps and bounds, definitely now a residential community. Today we look around us and see well-kept single houses with spacious lawns and think back over the years. What a change! To cap the climax we think nothing of attending the movies regularly, either here in town or in nearby theatres. Daily and nightly the radio brings to each and all of us interesting diversion.

Yes, that in brief, has been the history of our town. It has been a long pull from the first weary steps of exploration to the busy well-developed community of today. One by one the various steps in the making of our town have passed on. Each year, and each decade has had its interesting stories, most of which have long since been forgotten. Yet out of the long story one hopes that the highlights will always remain. They are not only interesting beacons of the past, but may well serve as some guide to the right paths to take in the future.

There are many other interesting avenues of our local history which are easily available to those who wish to make the effort. The public library has available a great deal of published material. Many of the old maps are worth inspecting. All of the original town meeting records have been typed and are bound. This set, complete from 1644 to 1812, is to be found in the public library. Turn to most any page in these records and you will find many interesting things.

## *Chapter Three*

### *The Development of Reading Town Government*

The story of the rise of the government of Reading is the story of what was in the very hearts of the men and women who have lived here through the years. Government has not been something which was thrust upon them from the outside, but something which people living together developed in order that their collective affairs might be carried on with better efficiency and greater justice.

#### *Government of the Massachusetts Bay Colony*

The first clew to understanding the government of Reading is to know something about the government of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The first settlers in the region around Boston and Salem were granted a charter with permission to settle and develop the lands in the New World. We were quite independent of the other colony, Plymouth, which was settled farther south. The holders of the original grants of land were Englishmen living in England, and they in turn made sub-grants to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The stockholders in the Massachusetts Bay Colony hoped that there would be profits which would be returned to them in England. If that was their thought, they were sorely disappointed, because it was not a profit making understanding on the part of those who actually came here to live.

The charter granted to the Massachusetts Bay Company, and later approved by the King, granted the Company the right to elect a Governor, a Deputy, and 18 Assistants. Seven of these Assistants with the Governor and the Deputy made a quorum which could transact all business. These men were the rulers of the entire colony. They had power to grant permission to settle, to make grants of land, to establish townships, and make whatever laws were necessary for the good of the colony, providing they were not contrary to the laws of the mother country—England.

These elected officers were to hold four meetings each year, to be known as a General Court. The General Court was to elect their own officers, and to admit new freemen to the government, and to act on all necessary business.

Who were the freemen? They were the men in each settlement who were entitled to vote. In order to vote one had to own a certain amount of land, or have a certain income. One had to be a member of the church—there was only one church at that time. Only men were included. The rights of freemen were highly prized, and a relatively small number of people were entitled to that privilege. For example, if you were a bonded servant you could not be a freeman until after your period of bonds was over—usually seven years. You had to obtain some land, and you must gain membership in the church.

Such were the conditions of government in the early settlements during the first and perhaps the second generation of settlers until the year 1684 when the English Court revoked the terms of the original charter. A few years later another charter was issued—1691—and under this charter we no longer elected our Governor. Henceforth he was appointed by the King. Strange as it may seem this had surprisingly little effect upon the government as actually carried out in Reading.

The local towns carried on their own local government from the very beginning, and although a royal governor was now in office he had comparatively little to say about local town affairs. We shall see further details of local government as we study the development of our own town government.

### *The Early Government of Reading*

The seat of our local government for more than the first 125 years was in the First Parish—now Wakefield. The first town meeting may well have been held in one of the cabins of the settlers. We have no record of any other official town meetings for three years, when in 1647 the voters met and “chose seven men looking after the affairs of the town”. It seems that in the three years



in which there were no meetings that some affairs began to develop which needed someone to look after them. So the seven men were appointed to look after them. Was not this the beginning of the idea of Selectmen?

The next year, 1648, there were two other town meetings and they established further important steps in government. First, there were chosen three surveyors of the highway. Later, and perhaps more important, it "was ordered and agreed by the town *that any six of the townsmen* seeing just cause for a general meeting, and giving warning of the time and place shall call a meeting, and that such men that shall be absent not being able to satisfy the company shall pay twelve pence for every such default, and further it was agreed that if anyone shall depart from the meeting not having leave, shall pay for every "such default six pence, and for the establishing of this order the town shall have chosen William Cowdry".

Now, there is a document for you! No halfway steps there! If any six men wished it they could call a meeting. Further, if you fail to attend you are fined! Of course this included only the men; only those who were freemen.

There were many further changes. For example, in 1649 William Cowdry was chosen Clerk of Writs—. He was to keep a record of all meetings. This is the beginning of the modern job of Town Clerk. Then in 1650 the number of men who had charge of the affairs of the town was reduced from seven to five. They had power "to order all town business but the giving of land and timber."

Finally, in 1651, came another important agreement. "It is also ordered that no public town meeting shall hold longer than a man can see to write or read in the place of meeting . . . And that any nine men shall have power to act any business that is done on that meeting day." This order was not passed because of anything that would go in in the meeting after dark, but to allow all of those attending to get home in time to look after their stock and do the work at home. It was to prevent a small number of people remaining until

late hours and passing business which others would not be present to hear.

The order that any "nine men shall have the power to act any business" shows that not all would attend. They made this rule in order to prevent some people who did not show up from holding back business by being absent. It also gives some indication of the relatively small number of people who could vote. Probably not more than a score of men were eligible to vote.

The years passed on. Every now and then new officials were appointed as were needed. It is rather interesting to look over the list of these early town officers and their duties. It throws a sidelight not only upon government but upon the life of the times as well. It gives some indication of the problem of government in those days.

### *Selectmen*

These have often been referred to as the "town fathers" and quite rightly, for they looked after the affairs of the town. They had practically sole authority to enforce ordinances and agreements. They could call a town meeting; they looked after the poor; they saw that other officers did their duties; they often settled disputes. They administered the affairs of the town. They held legal title to town properties, but could not give a deed without vote of the town. They were usually the larger land owners and were important in the church.

### *Clerk of Writs*

He was the town clerk. He kept all records. You will be interested to know that Reading has a complete set of official records of the early town meetings. Naturally, he had to be able to read and write, an accomplishment not everyone at that time possessed.

### *Road Surveyors*

In the early days there were almost no roads, but rather paths which led from house to house. It was the duty of the road surveyors to see to it that trees were

kept out of the paths; that fences were built along the highway to keep cattle out of roads. As the years passed along these officers became very important in laying out new roads. A settler would establish a cabin on some newly acquired land. Naturally, a path would in time open up to his home. A little later another settler would come. In due time a road would be opened. It was the duty of the road surveyors to lay out these new roads and to keep them open.

### *Fence Surveyors*

There were no barbed wire fences in those days. Only split rail fences and stonewalls. The problem of straying cattle must have been quite important because we find several records in the town relating to fencing. One of them is: "It is ordered that everyman's fence is to be five rails high. It is ordered that every man's fence is to be up, keeping out all cattle and hogs by the 14th of the next month." It was the duty of the fence surveyors to see that these rules were carried out.

### *Herdsmen*

During the summer some of the cows would be out of milk and turned out to pasture. These pastures were often the common lands of the town. That is, they belonged to the town as a whole and not to any particular person. Of course each farmer had his own pasture for his milch cows. To look after the cows turned out in the common pasture; to keep them rounded up; to protect them from the wolves and other beasts, the townspeople hired a herdsman. In 1649 he was paid twelve shillings a week! In addition he was to have one half peck of Indian corn for every beast he had under his care. Half of his other pay was to be in butter and wheat.

### *Tythingman*

Here was an important officer. He was partly political, and partly a church officer, though of course both were closely connected in those days. He had

usually some ten families under his care. He was to "diligently inspect them," especially on Sunday. He was to see that they regularly came to church, and had a little fox-tail wand with which he kept them awake during the long services. It was also his duty to see that the children learned the catechism. In addition he had to watch the taverns and report all unnecessary noises and disturbances that might arise. He was to report to the Justices all idle persons, swearers and Sabbath breakers. Any undesirable people who might come to town would be warned by him to stay out. He had indeed many and varied duties.

### *Commissioners*

These men were sort of justices of the peace. Men who could not otherwise settle their differences took them to the Commissioners for a hearing. They were important men, especially before the courts were sufficiently established. It took some years to set up the court system due to a lack of good roads. There were courts in Salem, Lynn, and in Boston, but it was a long day's journey for a court case. The town Commissioners settled most of the disputes.

### *Hog Reaves*

The duty of this man was to see that the hogs, goats, and sheep were "rung". In 1653 "it was ordered that every man shall well and sufficiently yoke his hogs by the 20th of March with a good and sufficient yoke." It was the duty of the hog reaves to see that such orders were carried out. The yokes were to keep the beasts from going through the fences. Sometimes rings were put in their noses so that they could be led on the end of a pole, much as a bull is today. The ring also prevented hogs from rooting.

## *Sealer of Weights and Measures*

### *Sealer of Wood*

### *Sealer of Leather*

Any "sealer" was a man who measured goods. A sealer of weights and measures saw to it that the scales and measuring dishes of the stores or peddlars were accurate. A sealer of wood saw to it that when a man bought a cord of wood that he was delivered a cord of wood.

Such were the duties of the outstanding early town officers!

### *Examples of Business in Early Town Meetings*

What were the early meetings of the townspeople like? In the first place, there was no regular time for them to meet, though later it was agreed to have at least two meetings a year. For the most part the meetings were held either late in the fall, or in the winter and early spring. People were too busy in the summer with crops and out-of-door work to hold meetings. Secondly, all voting was of course done either vocally or by a show of hands. It has been said that some of the early voting for officers to the General Court was done by using kernels of corn. Finally, there is no record of a town warrant being used until 1754, more than a hundred years after the first settlement. People were simply warned of a coming meeting, possibly in church, and the nature of the meeting was probably disclosed on arrival. Of course, then as now, gossip spread a great deal of news.

Following are several articles taken from the early meetings. Sometimes the words are exactly as passed, and sometimes they have been edited for the sake of simplicity. These articles give the clew to the kind of business that was transacted. It further bears out the earlier statement that government was something which people living here in Reading developed to fit their needs. They are a remarkable record of training in self government.

Aug. 20, 1647 Ordered by the town that all pine boards and plank shall pay two pence upon the hundred sold or marketed out of town.

Oct. 6, 1647 The common land was divided equally among all the settlers as follows: two acres for each person, and one acre for each cow, except that every one was to have at least ten acres. (Simply one sample of many such actions.)

Nov. 25, 1649 Men are to work at least six days per month in the months of March and April on the roads. Dates of work to be set by Road Surveyors. Men to report with oxen.

Sept. 18, 1648 The neck that is called Chadwell's Neck is given to Timothy Couper and also twelve acres of Meadow land upon this condition: if he come to improve it either by building or fencing by the third of March 1649, and if he does not come the land and Meadows return to the Town, and he or his heirs to pay fifty shillings to the Town for disappointing them of an inhabitant!

Dec. 4, 1649 It is ordered that no barn or hay stack shall be set within six poles (rods) of any dwelling house upon the penalty of twenty shillings. (To prevent danger of fire.)

Sept. 13, 1653 It is agreed with Brother Parker that he is to have 20 shillings a year for making clean the Meeting House.

Feb. 6, 1692 Voted not to be at any charge to fix the Mystick bridge unless compelled to by law . . . (of the General Court.)

Dec. 8, 1693 It was agreed and voted to keep a school.

June 5, 1711 Voted to send three representatives to the General Court.

May 8, 1705 It was voted and agreed that from this day forward the minister's salary shall be paid in lawful money of the province. (Previously paid in produce and wood, etc.)

March 7, 1709 Voted that the town school shall be kept in Wood End one quarter of the time for the present year.

July 24, 1712 Voted to have a town treasurer.

It is not necessary to go into more details. The official records of the early colonial days are typed and bound and may be found in the public library.

Although not mentioned frequently in the listing above, one of the persistent problems of the early townspeople was the disposing of lands. In the first twenty years the colonists of Reading made five official allotments of land to its members. Another annual matter was the question of the minister's salary. In the early days it was almost always given in terms of produce. Somewhat later it was divided between produce and money.

At first few taxes were levied. Most of the taxes were collected in the form of crops and goods such as Indian corn, wheat, butter, or wool. Later, taxes were raised to improve the highways, to support the schools, to support the minister, and other similar things. Sometimes a man could not pay his taxes in money. He would be permitted to work it out on the road. We find occasional references to people who asked to have their taxes abated, saying they could not pay them due to sickness in the family. These cases were brought up in the town meeting and discussed. Sometimes the abatements were granted and sometimes they were not.

So it was that the early townspeople of Reading lived, worked, and governed themselves. Able men these old timers were. There was very little pomp and ceremony about them. Surprisingly simple and straightforward with a shrewd sense of whether a man was doing his duty or shirking. There were some shirkers and laggards, but they were properly taken care of and were never permitted to interfere with the main drift of business and affairs. Such was life until about the time of the Revolutionary War.

## *Later Developments in Reading Government*

The early town business dealt mostly with questions of assigning lands, looking out for roads, providing the minister with his "rate", choosing the various town officials, and passing only those rules necessary to get along under the simple conditions of those times.

One interesting change was in the way the townspeople were notified of the town meetings. This is done today in a little document known as a Town Warrant which contains all the articles of business to be discussed in the meeting. In the very earliest times there is no record of a town warrant. We may suppose the town fathers simply had the minister announce in church there would be a meeting of the voters on a certain date at a certain place and at a certain time. A written notice may have been posted in the church.

The first town warrant of which there is a written record was issued in 1754, one hundred and ten years after the first charter. The wording of the various town warrants since that time show many interesting changes. Following are given six different forms used at different periods. Study carefully the *Italic* words. They indicate the key differences.

March 4, 1754:

"To James Woodward, Constable for Reading. Greeting—

You are hereby required *in his Majesty's name* and forthwith to warn the *freeholders* and other *Inhabitants* in your precinct *qualified as the Law directs* to meet at the South Meeting House in Reading on the first Monday of March at ten o'clock in the forenoon."

This indicates that we were warned by His Majesty's Government, the royal governor, to meet. It plainly shows that only freeholders were permitted to vote. One must own property, and be a member of the church, and



May 24, 1770:

"To James Smith, Jr., Constable of Reading. Greeting—

You are hereby required in *his Majesty's name* forthwith to warn the *freeholders* and other *Inhabitants* within your district, that *have an estate of freehold in land within Province of Massachusetts Bay of forty shillings per annum at least, or other estate to the value of forty pounds sterling* to assemble and meet in the Meeting House in the North Precinct on Thursday . . . . "

This indicates clearly the property qualification in order to vote. This qualification existed earlier, but it was not always included in the Warrant. The last time his Majesty's government issued a warrant for a town meeting was in 1776. Notice the change in the next form.

May 18, 1775:

"To the Constables of the Town of Reading: Greeting—

You are hereby required in the name of the *Provincial Congress* forthwith to warn the *freeholders & other Inhabitants* of your district *qualified by Law* to vote in Town to meet at the Meeting House in the Third Parish in said town on Wednesday . . . "

This third form was merely the first of a variety of forms used during the uncertain period after we declared our Independence from England. The next two forms are variations of the above.

July 3, 1775:

"To the Constables of the Town of Reading. Greeting—

You are hereby required in the name of the *Continental Congress* forthwith to warn the *freeholders* and other *Inhabitants* of your district that have an *Estate of Freehold* in land within this *Province or Territory* of *forty shillings per annum at least, or other Estate to the value of forty pounds of sterling* to assemble at the Meeting House . . . . "

May 9, 1776:

“To the Constables of the Town of Reading: Greeting—

By orders from the *General Court* of the *Colony of Massachusetts Bay* you are ordered to warn the *freeholders* and other *inhabitants* to meet at the Meeting House . . . .”

The following form is important for two reasons. First, it shows the more or less settled form that was used once the colony's independence was established. Second, it was the last time that the property qualification was included in the Warrant.

April 20, 1812:

“To either of the Constables of Said Town: Greeting—

You are ordered in the name of the *Commonwealth of Massachusetts* to notify and warn the *male inhabitants* of your district *being twenty-one years of age and upwards and resident within said Town for the Space of one year next Preceding having a freehold Estate within said Town of the annual income of ten Dollars, or any Estate to the value of two hundred dollars* to meet in the Meeting House of the North Parish . . . .”

These changes were more or less changes in form, and were not changes in spirit. The actual town meeting was carried on as before. There was a Moderator, the usual town officers, and free open discussion in the meeting upon the important issues of the day. In fact discussion in those days was often much more free than it is today. People felt more willing to get up in the meeting and express themselves, and had little fear of what their fellow townspeople might think. This was possible because the problems of those days were relatively simple. Practically every one was familiar with the real nature of the problem under discussion. Under such conditions there could be real discussion. Today, so many of our problems appear of technical nature that most people make no attempt to understand them.

The result is little interest in town meeting by most people, and only a very small amount of debate.

One indication of the greater amount of debate was the number of postponed meetings and the number of articles of business acted upon. The amount of business was often relatively small, but it was not uncommon to find a meeting adjourned two or three times. Today we have adjourned town meetings, but much of the business is rushed through without much discussion.

As the years went by problems became more and more difficult. Among the early problems was that of building roads. Roads were a necessity. It soon became necessary to spend considerable money for their construction and upkeep. Another important early problem was that of school support. It was voted to have the first school in 1693. Thereafter there were many discussions. Schools had to be established in different parts of the town, for the young children could not walk long distances. Just before the Civil War there came the question of building a high school. It could not be built in Reading village because then the boys and girls north of the Ipswich River would have no means of attending. It could not be built in that village because the young people here could not attend. This problem was settled by the separation of the two villages and forming of a separate town of North Reading. A new high school was soon built here.

There was also the problem of taking care of the town's poor. Should a poor house be built, or should the people be placed out to board in the various families of the town? Finally an almshouse was built, but not until after many a town meeting had discussed it. It is interesting to note in passing that the insane as well as the poor were housed there.

During the Civil War there was the question of raising money to pay the soldiers who had volunteered from Reading. Our local boys were encouraged to volunteer by being paid a sort of bonus by the town.

After the Civil War the problems of government increased very rapidly. The faster the town grew the

faster the problems grew. The old fashioned well once served as water supply for each family, but it was evident there was need for a village water supply. That was an important step, and one which cost money. In its day it occasioned considerable debate. Then there was the question of a town plant for the making of electricity. Should we buy it from some private concern or should we build our own plant to make and distribute the current? We built our own plant in 1894.

So it was that our forefathers attended to the town meetings. They listened and they talked. They talked and they listened. Should we do this, or should we do that? That has been the spirit of the past of our town. Throughout almost every period there have been a few leaders who have taken the initiative in bringing better things to our town.

You may wonder just how many people attended the early town meetings, and even those of later years. We cannot tell for sure, but certainly the number of votes cast for Governor would give some measure of the number of people voting in town at that time, or at least eligible to vote.

Table 1  
Number of Votes cast for Governor  
in Town of Reading

1786**	28 votes	1850*	485 votes
1790**	86 votes	1854*	448 votes
1795**	92 votes	1859	302 votes
1800**	184 votes	1864	398 votes
1810**	412 votes	1870	339 votes
1815*	285 votes	1880	617 votes
1820*	230 votes	1890	603 votes
1825*	135 votes	1900	897 votes
1830*	251 votes	1910	1058 votes
1835*	220 votes	1920	2858 votes
1840*	503 votes	1930	3625 votes
1845*	432 votes	1940	5834 votes

\*\*Town included all of North Reading, Wakefield, and Reading.

\*Town included North Reading.

# Table 2

## Table of Population of Reading

**1678	60 families	1880	4,088 persons
**1776	1,984 persons	1890	4,088 persons
*1812	1,500 persons	1900	4,969 persons
*1830	1,806 persons	1910	5,818 persons
*1840	2,193 persons	1920	7,439 persons
*1850	3,108 persons	1930	9,767 persons
1860	2,662 persons	1940	10,900 persons
1870	3,184 persons		

\*\*Town included all of what is now Reading, Wakefield and North Reading.

\*Town included North Reading and Reading.

### Summary

Reading was first settled in 1639, but was granted a charter giving the right to establish the town of "Redding" separate from Linn in the year 1644. We have grown through the years, and at one time included all the lands now included in Reading, North Reading and Wakefield.

Wakefield, then called South Reading, separated in 1812 because of political and economic differences in the interests of the townspeople of the two districts. In 1853 the town of North Reading separated due to the differences of interests between the two villages.

At first Reading was primarily a farming community. At one time it had important manufactures in cabinet making, shoes, and other small establishments. Since the Civil War it has developed newer businesses such as the stove foundry, the "rubber" shop, neckties, organ pipes, and art corners. We are no longer a farming community, nor are we a manufacturing community. We are a residential community.

We have had interesting developments of canals, turnpikes, and railroads pass by our doors. Important waves of religious differences have entered our homes. Social life has changed from time to time, yet there has always been some of the gayer side, so that Reading has never been known as a town inhabited by grouches.

Our government from the very first has resided in the town meetings which were open and free discussions to those who attended. We have increased considerably the interests and activities of our government. Things which formerly were left over to the individual family to look after as best one could are now looked after by the town.

So it was that Reading grew from 1644 to 1900.

## INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO

### *Reading Government As It Operates Today*

The plan of Part Two is to give a fairly complete picture of Reading Government as it is carried on today. There are really two distinct sections to Part Two. First, two chapters which give a general picture of how the government has increased its duties, and how it actually operates in general. Second, a detailed description of each Board and how it operates.

The plan of discussing each Board is to give the history of the Board, to present the duties of the Board, and to give some qualifications of candidates who ought to seek positions on the Board. Each of the major boards is carefully treated under this system. It is less true of the lesser boards and of the individual offices.

Town government can only be effective under two important conditions. First, that people of outstanding qualifications and character run for the office. Second, that the public is well informed of the duties and responsibilities of the office and are able to make an intelligent choice of the candidates.

Government in Reading is exactly what the people want to make it. There is all the power and authority to carry out their wishes. If men can be elected to office who will exercise these powers vigorously yet judiciously all will be well. If men secure these offices only for personal gain, then we may look for poor local government.

## *Chapter Four*

### ***Recent Changes in the Government of Reading***

#### *Growth in Scope of Government*

The early government in Reading was a comparatively simple affair. The town was small and the needs of the people were few. Most people were self sufficient in the home. There was very little travel. There was comparatively little interrelationship between the state and town government, and this was limited to such laws as prescribed the form and officers necessary in local government.

The amount of money necessary to raise by taxation was small. Less than one hundred years ago, in 1848, the total expenses of the town was just six thousand dollars. They increased five times in the next twenty years so that by 1870 the total expenses of the town were just over thirty-one thousand dollars. In the next thirty years they nearly trebled.

However, things were just beginning to happen. The period between 1890 and 1900 marks an important change in Reading government. The following table shows tremendous increases in valuation of property, amounts raised by local taxation, and population.

Table 3

Year	Valuation of taxable property	Amount raised from local taxation	population
1890	\$ 2,631,000	\$ 45,710	4,088
1900	4,413,000	86,083	4,969
1915	7,905,000	167,617	
1925	13,284,000	469,440	
1930	15,830,000	495,492	9,767
1935	16,588,000	530,833	
1939	16,927,000	575,518	10,900

From Table 3 it is at once clear that the amount raised from local taxation practically doubled in the ten years from 1890 to 1900. It doubled again in the next fifteen years from 1900 to 1915. It more than



doubled again in the next ten years. Finally, by 1930 it had practically reached the half million mark. In other words, in the last fifty years the amount of money raised from local taxation in Reading has increased over ten times. At the same time the value of taxable property increased about seven times, and the population increased but two and one half times.

The 1890's ushered in years of change. The use of machines in factories was once and for all established. This meant a distinct change of life for people around the Reading area. No longer was rural life, centering on farming, to be the primary way of living. People were now residing in Reading, and commuting to their jobs in Boston, Somerville, Cambridge, Lawrence and many other places.

At first people travelled to these jobs by train, but in the middle of the 1890's electric trolley cars came to Reading. Finally, the automobile and bus were the means of travel to and from work.

Electric lights and electric gadgets came to be accepted articles in the home. People began to demand as necessities items which before had been considered luxuries. No longer did the private well satisfy the family needs. Everyone wanted running water in the house. Improved plumbing and bathtubs were rapidly installed. People commuting to work began to have shorter hours and an increased amount of leisure time, which was spent in part at motion pictures and by the radio, but also in part out of doors. Life was rapidly changing.

What did all of this mean in terms of government? It meant, as never before, a rapid expansion of services. The demand for running water led to the establishment of the pumping system, and later to the development of the artesian wells. They cost money. The demand for electric lights led to the establishment of an electric light plant. That cost money. The automobile led to the demand that roads be hard surfaced and that the

square be cemented. That cost money. The desire for improved plumbing led to a demand for increased sewerage facilities. That, too, cost money. The increased leisure and changed social life resulted in the demand for parks and playgrounds. They cost money. No longer were young people able to leave school at the end of the eighth grade and secure satisfactory jobs. Times had changed and the cry of the day was more education. This led to the demand for more and better schools. They also cost money. Then came the depression with many people out of work with no way of caring for themselves. Humanity demanded that they be cared for. Still more money was needed.

So it has been that the last fifty years has seen a tremendous increase in scope of government. No longer are we in the "horse and buggy" days with dirt roads and simple ways of living. We are in a complex and highly developed machine age which require greater community services. It is a safe bet that few people today would do without cement highways, good fire and police protection, parks and playgrounds, schools, adequate sewerage, and the many other services which we have and take for granted today, that even fifty years ago were scarcely thought about. These are services which today are demanded by the people. They cost money and must be paid for if we have them.

### *Change in Attitude Toward Government*

In the early days and perhaps up to as late as 1890 the chief purposes of local government were to provide order; to provide an opportunity to get simple services; to provide for an elementary education; and too see to it that town affairs went on smoothly from year to year.

Today local government has not only these simple functions, but greatly increased responsibilities. It is true not only of Reading but of all local communities throughout the nation. People expect their government to do things for them. People expect the town to provide adequate schooling through the high school. They

expect that people who are unemployed shall not be allowed to be in want. They expect to have complete and instant police and fire service. They expect their children shall have an opportunity to play somewhere besides in the streets.

There has also been one additional change. In the early days the state set up relatively few requirements for local towns to meet. Today there is literally a myriad of state requirements which every town is compelled to meet. We are compelled to make certain old age assistance payments. We are compelled to have certain health and safety precautions with our water and sewerage. We are compelled to pay our share in upkeep of certain state and county institutions.

So it is that the attitude of the people toward government has changed.

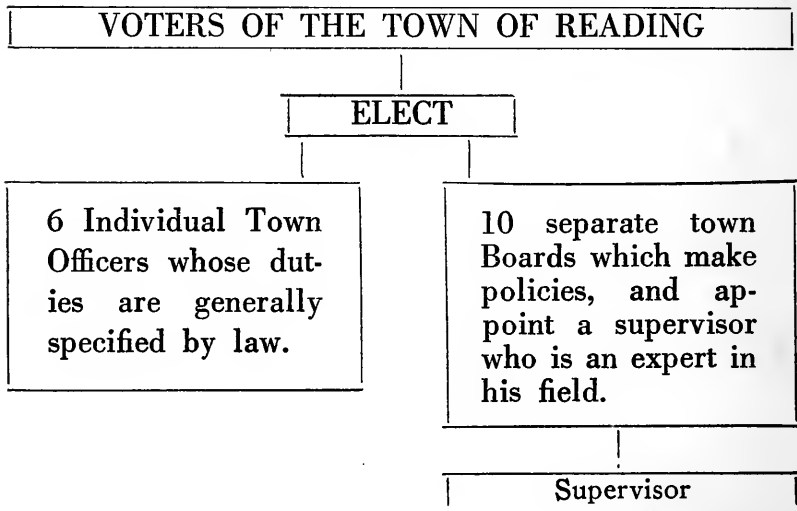
## *Chapter Five*

### ***Organization of Reading Government in 1940***

#### *How Voters Control Town Affairs*

The local government of Reading is very definitely regulated by the general laws of the state which determine how all towns shall be governed. There are three general kinds of local government in Massachusetts. They are city government, town government, and limited town government. Reading has a town government, in theory the nearest to a pure democracy of any of the three forms.

Town government in Massachusetts is so organized that the voters annually elect certain officers who carry out certain duties. The voters in town meeting pass upon all major policy making proposals, and upon all appropriations of money. The actual control of the government is indicated by the following diagram.



One important feature of this type of town government is that each board and officer is entirely independent of other boards and officers. The duties of each board and officer are usually set up in considerable detail by law. *The unfortunate part of this set up is, there is no single person or board which has the power to co-ordinate the work of all of the boards.* In Reading this co-ordination takes place by members of the various boards voluntarily getting in touch with one another.

Reading is incorporated as a town. It holds an annual town meeting for the purpose of electing town officers and for the purpose of transacting the business of the town. It may hold special town meetings. The following officers are elected in Reading by ballot.

Moderator	School Committee
Town Clerk	Municipal Light Board
Treasurer	Board of Assessors
Tax Collector	Board of Health
Tree Warden	Board of Public Welfare
Constables	Trustees of Library
Board of Selectmen	Trustees of Cemeteries
Board of Public Works	Planning Board

There are in addition over thirty-five different appointments to various official town positions. The Selectmen make the greatest number of these appointments.

The plan of our government is that the townspeople shall meet and choose the above boards and officers who shall be empowered to see that the duties entrusted to them are carried out. If the townspeople do not like the way an officer or Board is doing the work, they may either cut down their appropriations, or they may elect other members who may try to bring about desired changes.

### *Examples of Legal Duties Granted to Towns*

A town has rather complete authority with which to carry on its government. This authority is granted to it by the state in the form of specific laws which gives the town a right to do certain definite things. Follow-

ing are several examples of things which the town may do by authority of state laws. The list is not complete.

1. The town must hold an annual meeting, and it may hold special meetings.
2. Notices of Town Meetings and the business to be transacted must be printed in a Warrant at least seven days before the meeting.
3. The town may elect officers and give them authority to act.
4. The town may raise money for at least forty-one different purposes, and under certain conditions may raise money for about a dozen additional purposes. Some of these purposes follow:
  - a. For the support of the schools.
  - b. For the support of the poor and needy.
  - c. To build streets and roads.
  - d. To improve parks and playgrounds.
  - e. To provide police and fire protection.
  - f. To maintain libraries.
  - g. To print town reports and public records.
  - h. To carry out elections.
  - i. To buy land.
  - j. To build sewers.
  - k. To build sidewalks.
5. The town may borrow money. A bond issue requires a two-thirds vote of those attending a town meeting.
6. The town may make necessary by-laws for health, sanitation, and development of the town and for the regulation of nuisances.
7. A town may not go into debt above a certain amount without state approval.
8. A town may buy and sell land.
9. A town may tax its residents for real estate and personal property holdings.
10. A town may make contracts to build bridges, buildings, roads, etc. and to do such things as provide transportation for children to school.

## *By-Laws of the Town*

In addition to the general powers granted to the town by the state, there are additional regulations which the town has adopted itself. These are known as By-Laws. The By-Laws set up in further detail the duties of officers; they set up additional rules and regulations of the town. They deal with such topics as follows:

1. When the town meetings shall be held.
2. Method of conducting business at the town meeting.
3. Seal of the town.
4. Duties and makeup of the Law Committee.
5. Duties of the Town Counsel.
6. Powers and Duties of the Finance Committee.
7. Additional duties of town officers not mentioned in the state laws.
8. Purchases of materials costing more than \$2,000 must be by sealed bids and contracts.
9. Regulations concerning posting signs, peddling goods, driving, etc. in the public highways.
10. Police regulations.
11. Granting of certain licenses.
12. Definite restrictions as to the kind of building one may build in certain districts, and the kind of business one may conduct in certain districts of the town.

## *The Town Meeting*

From the point of view of the voters the most important part of town government is the town meeting. At this meeting is transacted the important town business of raising and appropriating money to carry on the government, and deciding on general policies which the town shall carry out.

The annual town meeting is held on the first Monday of March. This meeting is for election of officers and to vote on any subject which may have been referred to the ballot by a previous town meeting. After the ballots are counted and the results announced the meet-

ing is adjourned. The business meeting is conducted on the second Monday in March, one week after the election.

Notices of the town meeting must be given in a Town Warrant at least seven days before the meeting. The Warrant contains a list of all the business to be conducted by the town at that meeting. No business not on the Warrant can be brought before the town meeting. The Warrant must be posted in at least five different places in town, and is usually published in The Reading Chronicle.

The making out of the Warrant is in the hands of the Selectmen. If a person wishes to place an article in the Warrant he may do so by securing the signatures of ten registered voters in the town to his proposed article and presenting these to the Selectmen. They must insert the article in the Town Warrant. If it is a special town meeting, then it is necessary to secure the signatures of one hundred registered voters. The Selectmen direct the Warrant to the Constables who must see to it that it is published and properly posted, so that the townspeople will be legally notified of the business to be conducted. If the Selectmen refuse to call a meeting then the Justice of Peace may call the meeting providing he receives the request in writing signed by one hundred registered voters.

The town meetings in recent years have been held in Security Hall. The capacity of the hall is under 800. There are over 6,000 registered voters in town. It is clear that if all the voters wished to attend the meeting they could not do so. However, it is a very unusual meeting which fills the hall. Usually less than ten per cent of the voters attend the annual business meeting. Sometimes fewer than fifty people attend special town meetings, which represents less than 1% of the voters.

The actual town meeting is presided over by the Moderator. He asks the Town Clerk to read an article from the Warrant. After the article is read, someone makes a motion in relation to the article. There is discussion by the townspeople upon the motion. The townspeople then vote on the motion and it is either passed



or lost. When all of the business under one article is taken up, the Town Clerk reads the next article and action is taken on that. So it is that the meeting is conducted.

Custom has set up the listing of articles for the annual meeting and one will do well to become familiar with these. *Article one* in the annual meeting always relates to the election of town officers and voting on any topic which the town may have previously referred to a written ballot. *Article two* is to hear the reports of the various town boards and take whatever action seems best in relation to those reports. This article is usually laid on the table because all of the reports of the town officers are printed in the Annual Town Report and there is no need of going over it again. *Article three* relates to the election of certain minor town officers. Someone makes a motion that certain people be elected to these positions and the people vote. *Article four* has to do with raising and appropriating money for general town government. This article is a long one. Under this article each board makes a motion that a certain amount of money be raised and appropriated to carry on its work. The work and suggested appropriation is usually contained in the report of the Finance Committee.

Other articles follow relating to necessary town business such as borrowing money, setting up a reserve fund, etc. Then come the various special articles in the Warrant. These may relate to almost any type of question from raising money for some particular purpose, such as buying a new fire engine or building a school, to the question of whether or not people may be allowed to play baseball on Sunday in the public parks.

Occasionally unusual matters may come up in the summer or fall of the year. Definite action is required at once. The matter cannot wait for the annual meeting. The Selectmen may call a special town meeting. There are usually at least two of these held during the year, and sometimes as many as five or six.

The business in the town meeting is conducted according to rules and regulations set up by the by-laws of the town. Some of these rules are listed below.

1. The Moderator shall decide on all questions of order, subject to appeal of the meeting.
2. The Moderator shall declare all votes, and whenever a vote is doubted by seven voters a count shall be made.
3. All original questions shall be put in order. In case of amendments, that amendment is voted on first which provides for the largest expenditure of money.
4. Every person who wishes to speak shall rise and respectfully address the Moderator, and he shall not speak until recognized by him.
5. No person shall speak for more than ten minutes without permission from the rest of the meeting.
6. No person speaking shall be interrupted but by a call to order.
7. No motion shall be received until it is seconded; but no motion that is seconded shall be withdrawn if any voter objects.
8. All committees shall be appointed by the Moderator unless otherwise specified.
9. Bond issues must be by a two thirds vote.
10. Cushing's Manual serves as the authority on rules and order.

## *Chapter Six*

### ***The Development and Duties of the Major Town Boards***

#### *Introduction to Board Government*

The general plan of government by Board is that the townspeople elect a town board to supervise certain definite duties. The Board's relationship to the voters is one of trust and policy making. The Board looks at its duties and then draws up certain general broad policies which they plan to follow. Members of the Board are the voter's representatives for this particular job.

To actually administer the work of the Board, there is appointed an expert. The expert should be a man with an educational training and experience fitting him for that particular field of work. The superintendent should have supervision and control of the details of the job. His job is to see to it that the work of the department goes forward in an efficient way.

Thus the voters elect a Board which is responsible to them. The Board makes general plans and policies. It gets its approval from the voters in town meetings. The actual administration of the policies is in the hands of an expert, a superintendent, who is especially trained for his work.

#### ***1. The Board of Selectmen***

##### *History*

The Board of Selectmen is probably the oldest authorized board in town. At the second recorded town meeting in 1647 the town chose "seven men to look after the town affairs". Later, in 1650, the number of men was reduced to five. These men could look after all town affairs except to distribute land and sell timber. They were correctly call the "town fathers".

As the years went on their rights and powers increased or decreased from time to time. For example, in 1647 the town voted to give to the Selectmen power to draw orders upon the Town Treasurer to pay the town's debts.

For many years the title of the Selectmen was: "Selectmen, Assessors, and Overseers of the Poor". Later, in 1889, it was: "Selectmen, Assessors, Board of Health, and Overseers of the Poor". The following year, 1890, the Board of Assessors was created as a separate board, and in 1909 the Overseers of the Poor was created as a separate board. So it was that the interests and the authority of the Board of Selectmen changed from time to time. The number of men on the board has likewise varied from seven to five to three.

Today the Board of Selectmen consists of three members who are elected by the townspeople. Each member serves a period of three years, but their terms are so arranged that only one new member is elected each year. They meet every Monday evening in the Municipal Building. They employ a clerk who looks after many of the details of the work. In Reading the position of Clerk and Town Accountant is held by the same man.

### *Duties*

The duties of the Selectmen of today are:

1. To appoint some thirty town officials who are not elected to office. They also nominate for appointment certain officials which are approved by state departments.
2. To receive weekly reports from the fire and police departments. They receive reports from other departments as often as there are reports or business to consider.
3. To receive and attend to complaints of all sorts which various citizens or organizations make concerning town government.
4. To make minor rules and regulations.
5. To hold hearings for permits to build gasoline stations and other buildings.

6. To issue all sorts of licenses and permits.
7. To make up a jury list and draw jurors in the presence of the Town Clerk and Constables.
8. To appoint and supervise election officials.
9. To approve W. P. A. projects.

Thus, they have charge of general town government which is not under the supervision of some other specific department. The Selectmen have no authority to interfere with the actions of other boards which are elected by the people.

### *Appointments and Duties of the Appointees*

The Selectmen appoint the Chief of Police from a list of Civil Service applications. They also appoint from the Civil Service list the other members of the police force. They may make promotions, and hold hearings for conduct "unbecoming an officer."

The Selectmen appoint the Fire Chief, who is not a Civil Service man. The Fire Chief in Reading appoints all the men who work under him.

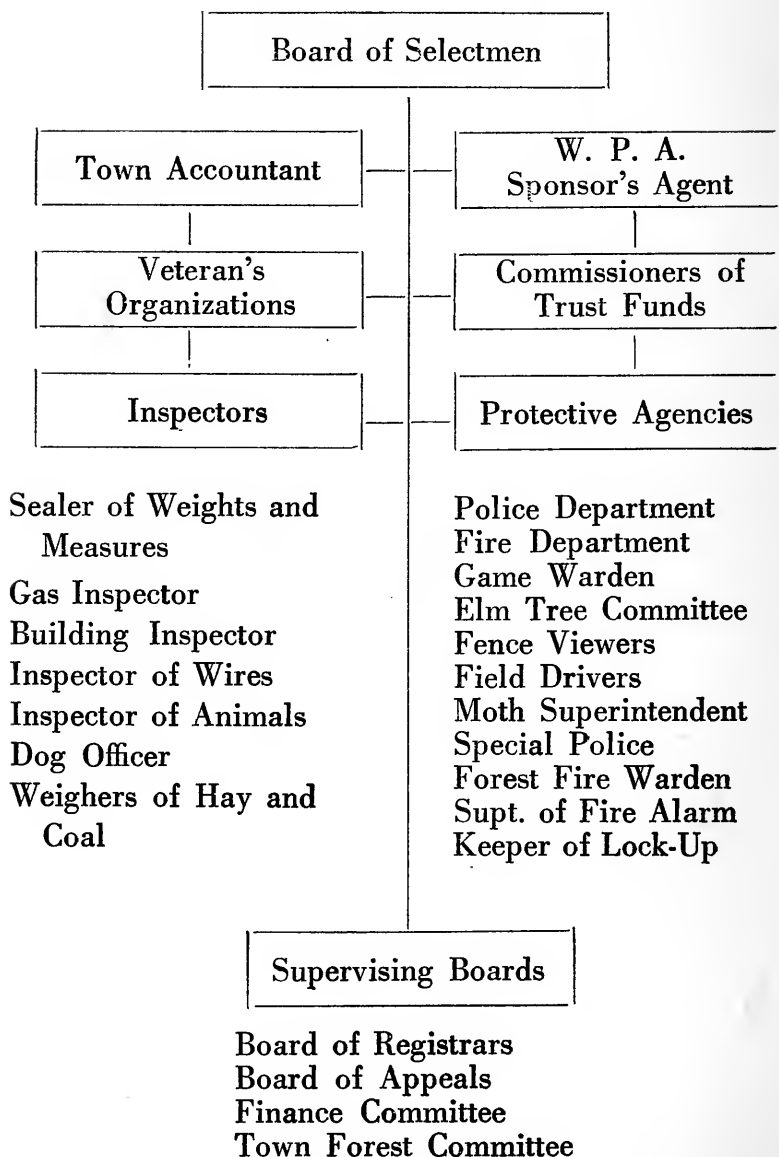
Each year the Selectmen appoint five members to the Finance Committee, each member to serve for three years. There are a total of fifteen men serving on the Finance Committee. It is the duty of this committee to study the estimates of expenditures of the various departments each year, and to make recommendations to the voters concerning these expenditures. By totaling the various expenditures they can make an estimate of the tax rate, and thus put a check on unneeded items which might force the tax rate up too high. Each year they issue a report with the Town Warrant indicating whether or not they approve of certain articles in the Warrant, from a financial point of view. The town may vote items which the Finance Committee has not approved if it sees fit to. The opinion of the Finance Committee is advisory and not binding.

The Selectmen appoint a Board of Registrars consisting of three members. The duties of this board are to keep a list of registered voters to be used at the polls for voting purposes, and to give people an opportunity

# CHART OF APPOINTMENTS

## BY

### BOARD OF SELECTMEN



to register to vote. In order to vote in Reading one must be twenty-one-years old, a citizen, have resided in the town at least six months and in the state at least one year. They must prove their ability to read and write, and they must have registered with the Board of Registrars. Men must pay a poll tax.

The Selectmen appoint the W. P. A. Sponsor's Agent, who is the man who supervises the W. P. A. work in Reading. In theory, the Board of Selectmen approve all of the W. P. A. projects in Reading. Actually the jobs are worked out by various departments and submitted to the Selectmen for approval. The Sponsor's Agent is really the superintendent who looks after the work.

The Selectmen appoint a plumbing inspector whose duty it is to inspect all new houses, factories and schools to see that the plumbing is properly installed. He also inspects the plumbing on repair jobs.

The Selectmen appoint a sealer of weights and measures. He goes around to stores and checks the scales to see that they are accurate in their weighing. He checks everything from one ounce scales, to the scales used by pedlars, to the big scales used for weighing coal. He also has the right to go into stores and secure a ten-pound package of materials such as sugar and then weigh it to see if there are really ten pounds there. Store owners found cheating by giving short weight are liable to a fine.

The Selectmen appoint an Inspector of Buildings. It is his duty to see to it that the new buildings, residential and factory and remodeled buildings meet the specifications of the building law of 1931. In that year the town passed a building law which was very definite and detailed in kind of materials and method of constructing buildings. The building inspector sees that these laws are enforced.

The Selectmen appoint a Wire Inspector whose duty it is to inspect all electric wiring in remodeled or newly built homes, factories or public buildings. These wire inspections are to prevent fires from poor or sloppy wiring jobs.

The Board of Selectmen appoints the Dog Officer whose duty it is to round up the dogs and see that they are properly licensed. He also takes care of stray dogs. He is responsible not only to the Board but to the Middlesex County Commissioner.

The Selectmen appoint a Forest Fire Warden whose duty it is to fight brush and grass fires. He also may make general regulations for the prevention of forest or brush fires such as ordering certain brush heaps cared for, or underbrush cleared away.

The Selectmen appoint a Moth Superintendent who is approved by the State Department of Conservation at Boston. It is his duty to spray the trees for the control of insects, moths in particular. The town also sprays fruit and other trees for town residents, but at a small charge.

The Selectmen appoint a Game Warden who is approved by the Division of Fisheries at the State Department of Conservation in Boston. It is his duty to see that the fish and game laws are observed throughout the town.

The Selectmen appoint an Inspector of Animals who is approved by the State Department of Agriculture in Boston. It is his duty to inspect barns of cattle, goats, and sheep to see that they are kept in good condition so that people buying products from these places will be sure that they are produced under reasonably clean conditions.

The Selectmen appoint a Supervisor of Soldier's Relief. It is the duty of this officer to see that any veteran of the army, navy or marines shall not be in want, nor shall any immediate member of their families be in want.

The Selectmen appoint a Burial Agent who sees to it that any sailor, soldier or marine or their immediate families shall receive a respectable burial. It will be at town expense if the family has no means of its own.

The Selectmen appoint a Custodian of Soldier's Graves whose duty it is to care for the entire lot in which any soldier, sailor or marine may be buried. It also sees that these graves are appropriately marked.



The Selectmen appoint Weighers of Coal and Hay. These are usually men who have large weighing scales and are located at places where people can get coal or hay weighed. There are six of them in Reading.

The Selectmen appoint three Fence Viewers whose duty it is to settle minor disputes over fences. They determine where the property line runs, whether or not there is to be a fence, and if so, who shall build it and how much of the cost shall be borne by each party.

The Selectmen appoint a Town Accountant. It is his duty to issue an official accounting of all financial records of the town each year. He more or less takes the place of the old public office of Auditor of Accounts. In Reading the Accountant's job is combined with that of Clerk of the Selectmen. The two jobs together form a full time position.

Thus it is that one of the major duties of the Selectmen is to make many appointments. Some of these are very responsible positions, while others are minor jobs. Some are strictly honorary, and others carry a small amount of pay.

### *Hearing Reports*

A second important responsibility of the Selectmen is to hear the reports which are made weekly to the Board. Every Monday evening at the Municipal Building finds the Selectmen seated around a table. To them come the Police and Fire Department chiefs to make a weekly report. At this time the Selectmen take up with these two departments any details of business which is necessary, and enter any complaints which may have been received.

Other men who are appointed by the Selectmen appear from time to time to make their reports. Needless to say, it is not always necessary for every appointee to appear every week. For example, the Sealer of Weights and Measures appears only after he has made an investigation. Nevertheless, there is a definite time and place set to hear such reports if any are to be made. Occasionally the Selectmen may ask an official to appear and make a report.

## *Receiving and Attending to Complaints*

A third important duty of the Selectmen is to listen to and to act upon complaints of various people of the town. For example, there was recently considerable discussion and many complaints over the question of foul odors which seem to drift in from the West. These complaints were made to the Selectmen. The Selectmen in turn reported the matter to the State Board of Health, and secured a public hearing on the matter. They saw to it that a further investigation was made.

Recently someone reported to the Selectmen what was apparently a violation of the Zoning Law. The Selectmen notified the Building Inspectors and saw to it that a decision was reached on the matter.

Occasionally there are public nuisances. They range all the way from undesirable people who settle along the highway peddling wares, to people who destroy property. The Selectmen investigate, and often-times through their police power are able to get rid of bothersome matters.

Sometimes members of the Board of Selectmen feel that one of their chief duties is chasing down these complaints. The greatest authority rests in this board, therefore it is to them that most of the complaints come.

## *Making Regulations*

The Selectmen have the authority to make regulations for the good of the town. They have a right to regulate where parking shall take place; to designate such rules as will permit the fire department to do their work effectively. They may set up signs of one way streets, etc.

## *Holding Public Hearings*

There are several types of hearings which the Selectmen may hold. One of the common types is where a man presents a petition to build a gasoline station at a certain point. The Selectmen issue a notice and hold a public hearing at which time the neighbors, other town boards, and other citizens may protest the granting of the

petition. The petitioner may present evidence as to what he will do to meet their objections. Hearings may also be called upon such questions as how to better downtown parking conditions. They may hold hearings on proposed legislation which the town sponsors.

### *Licenses*

The list of licenses which the Selectmen grant is far too long to be included. In general a license is or is not granted to people on the basis of whether or not it is for the good of the town. One must have licenses to conduct restaurants, to peddle goods in the streets, or to carry garbage through the streets. If a stranger comes to town to peddle goods he is supposed to get a license from the Selectmen.

### *Jury List*

Every year there must be a list of people who are desirable candidates to serve upon the Superior Court Jury in Somerville, and occasionally upon the Grand Jury. It is the duty of the Selectmen to approve of the list, and to make the drawing of jurors. It is done without thought of political affiliation, giving consideration only to general fitness to serve as a juror.

### *Election Officials*

The conduct of elections in town is under the supervision of the Selectmen. Part of this duty is given to the Board of Registrars which takes care of registration of voters and compiling the voting list. All elections and town meetings must have checkers at the door to see that only people who are eligible are permitted to enter the meetings. It is the duty of the Selectmen to see that an equal number of each of the two major political parties serve on these positions. This is required by state law. These election officials are appointed by the Selectmen and receive an hourly pay.

### *Approving W. P. A. Projects*

A comparatively recent, but very important duty has lately come to the Selectmen. It is that of approving W. P. A. projects. These projects are prepared in de-

tail by other town boards, and perhaps in some cases by the Selectmen themselves. The Selectmen in turn consider the various projects submitted and choose the ones for local approval. They then submit these to the regional Director of the W. P. A. at Boston and try to get the approval of the National government. It is in this way that many of the W. P. A. projects have been approved and carried on. Once the project is awarded by the National government it is then given to the local Sponsor, appointed by the Selectmen, to supervise and carry out.

### *Qualifications for Office*

The Selectmen are one of the most important of the town's boards. Their duties and powers are broad. They regularly meet and discuss the town's affairs. They frequently do considerable outside work. There is no pay, but they do have a small expense allowance.

To such a responsible position the town needs men of three important qualifications. First, the person must be a man of intelligence and wide education. Second, the person must be sincerely public spirited and look at the various problems and questions which are constantly arising from the point of view—"what is the best decision to make from the point of view of the town as a whole." One cannot be a successful and wise Selectman if one is considering simply one part of the town, especially the part where one lives and owns property. Finally, the Selectmen should be men of real character and good judgment. They cannot be wishy washy. The enforcement of the police department is largely in their hands. To say the least this is one of the most important departments concerning public welfare and safety. The Selectmen must take stands to see to it that these and other departments function honestly, effectively and impartially. They often handle delicate yet important questions. The decisions of the Selectmen count. To make such decisions we must have men in office who have the broad point of view and to make decisions which are for the real welfare and wise development of the town.

## 2. *The Board of Public Works*

### *History*

The Board of Public Works in Reading was established by an act of the Massachusetts Legislature in 1921. The present Board of Public Works is an outgrowth of several departments which had previously operated under the supervision of the Board of Selectmen.

Before the establishment of the Board of Public Works, there were separate departments of road commissioners, water commissioners, and sewer commissioners. There was often considerable confusion in the activities of these departments. Sewers had to be installed. Water lines had to be laid. Roads had to be resurfaced. It sometimes would happen that the road commissioners would have a street resurfaced. The next year the water commissioners would dig it up to lay water lines. Perhaps a year or so later the sewer department would find it necessary to dig the street up again, either to repair a sewer or to lay a new line. This constant digging up and resurfacing of the same road led to much confusion and often a needless repetition of work. So, it was decided to petition the state legislature to set up a Board of Public Works and combine the activities of several departments under one head.

The Board of Public Works consists of five members who serve without pay, each elected by the voters. Each member serves three years. The terms of office are so arranged that all members do not come up for election at once. The Board meets every Monday night at eight o'clock on the second floor of the Municipal Building.

### *Duties*

The duties of the Board of Public Works are well set forth in the Act of 1921 which established the board. Among other things the act provided:

1. The said Board of Public Works shall have all of the rights, powers, and authority vested in the Selectmen, including the authority vested

- in them as a Board of Survey . . . in respect to laying out, construction, maintenance, and repair of drains, and granting of franchises or locations in public ways for electric or other railways or pole locations.
2. The said Board of Public Works shall also have all the rights, powers, and authority vested in the Water Commissioners of Reading . . . and in addition thereto, the Board of Park Commissioners.
  3. It shall be the duty of said Selectmen in relation to streets and drains, and said Water Commissioners, Sewer Commissioners, and Park Commissioners to turn over to said Board of Public Works all contracts, papers, documents, plans and other property of any kind or nature.
  4. Nomination for candidates of Board of Public Works shall be made by written document signed by fifteen registered voters. Such document shall be filed with the Town Clerk at least ten days before the annual election.
  5. The Board of Public Works shall appoint an agent who shall be known as the Superintendent of Public Works, who shall be the administrative head of all departments of the town within the supervision of the Board of Public Works. He shall be a person especially fitted by education and training to perform said duties, and shall be chosen irrespective of his political opinions. He may or may not be a resident of the town. During the time he holds office he shall hold no other elective or appointive office, nor shall he engage in any other occupation.
  6. The Superintendent of Public Works shall, subject to the approval of the Board of Public Works, appoint such assistants, agents, and employees as the duties of the various departments shall require.
  7. The Superintendent shall keep a full and complete record of the doings of his office.

Thus, it is at once apparent that the Board of Public Works has complete authority to carry on its work. The board of five men makes general broad policies, but the actual administration of the work is left to a Superintendent. The Superintendent must be a man who is professionally trained for his position.

The Board of Public Works supervises four fields of activity. They are the Water Works, the Highways and Sidewalks, the Sewer system, and the public Parks.

### *Water Department*

There is a variety of duties to be performed in the water department. First of all, it is the duty of this department to keep the people of Reading supplied with usable drinking water.

In the early days water was supplied mostly by private wells, but in 1889 at a special town meeting a group of water commissioners were elected to secure for the town a reliable source of supply which could be used for drinking and fire purposes. Several possibilities were mentioned, including the use of water from four nearby ponds; from wells and springs established in some of the several Reading lowlands. At one time they even considered tying in with the Metropolitan water supply of Boston. However, it was found that satisfactory water supplies could be had by sinking wells near Mill street. The pumping station was built there in 1891. By building additional wells, this source of supply lasted until 1923 when the State Board of Health recommended another source, because this was not wholly satisfactory. Various studies were made. In 1930 it was decided to use the Hundred Acre Meadow as a source of water. This was accomplished by driving artesian wells. The next year the wells were driven, and a new pumping station installed.

It is the duty of the Board of Public Works to supervise this water supply, the pumping stations both at Hundred Acre Meadow and at Mill street. They see to it that the water is properly filtered and that it is clean and purified ready to use. The importance of this

task is realized when we find that they pump nearly 250,000,000 gallons of water a year at an average cost of 10.6 cents per 1,000 gallons.

Other duties performed by the water department are:

1. To lay out new water mains.
2. To establish water entrances into homes.
3. Test, repair and install meters.
4. Take regular water meter readings to send out water bills.
5. Inspection and care of hydrants.
6. Develop long range plans for the future growth of distributing water.

Anyone having any difficulty with their water should immediately notify the Board of Public Works, and they will investigate the matter.

### *Highways and Sidewalks*

Another important service of the Board of Public Works is maintaining and building our highways and sidewalks. In the old days the highways were under the road commissioners, usually a board of three elected by the public. Then, highway maintenance was largely a matter of keeping the roads passable during the spring, digging culverts, and laying out new roads. The coming of the automobile has greatly increased the burden of highway layout and construction. The rapid development of the town since 1900 has also increased the burden of laying out new streets.

What is the work of the highway department today? First, it consists of keeping the present highways in good order. The snow and ice must be removed in the winter. For this purpose the town has a fleet of eleven truck driven snow plows, and two tractor driven sidewalk plows. It has in addition a tractor tread bulldozer and nine horse drawn sidewalk plows. In winters when the snowfall is considerable this adds a great deal to the expense of this department, though much of it is for labor. On icy days trucks of sand must go around and keep all dangerous corners sanded to avoid accidents.



In the summertime the department resurfaces the streets and patches places where holes have developed. One of the main jobs of the summer and fall months is the laying out of new streets. The Board has set up very definite regulations which all new streets must meet. This is to prevent little narrow alley type streets being built which might at some later date have to be torn out at great expense and trouble.

In order to lay out a street one must go to the Board and secure a proper form and fill it out. One must provide detailed sets of plans and drawings to a certain definite scale. All directions, locations and boundaries must be carefully stated. This information is given to the Board of Survey, which is under the supervision of the Board of Public Works. A public hearing is held, at which time people may come to support the proposed street or to oppose it. The Board decides whether or not to grant the privilege of building the street on the basis of the facts developed in the hearing. A person desiring a new street laid out should notify the Board at least a year in advance of having the street actually laid out.

There are two types of road construction that is carried on. There is the so called Chapter 90 construction—Chapter 90 of the General Laws of Massachusetts. This act authorizes the construction of permanent type roadways under the supervision of the State Board of Public Works. The cost of this type of work is charged as follows: one half to the state, one quarter to the county, and one quarter to the town. State funds for this purpose are taken from receipts of the state gasoline tax. Then there is the so called Betterments Act which permits towns to improve the roads of their community entirely at their own expense.

In addition to the roads, the construction and care of sidewalks comes under this department. If one wishes to have a sidewalk built he goes to the Board and secures the proper blanks, and petitions to have such a sidewalk built. At that time he will be given a paper which de-

scribes the conditions under which he may secure his sidewalk. Briefly, they are as follows:

1. The town pays one half the cost. The property owner pays the other half.
2. The cost of granolithic (cement) sidewalks is estimated at sixty cents per lineal foot to the property owner, though it is frequently less than that.
3. The owner has two methods of paying for it:
  - a. he may pay cash in advance OR
  - b. he may have it placed on his tax bill so that he will pay the expense off not later than ten years.

The Board has approximately 70 miles of streets and 100 miles of sidewalks to maintain. Naturally, to carry on all of this heavy work requires a great deal of heavy and often fairly expensive equipment. The Board is charged with the care and upkeep of this equipment.

### *Sewer Department*

The sewer department also comes under the supervision of the Board of Public Works. The days of tossing the dish water out the kitchen window, and of having out-houses has gone. The first sewers were laid in Reading in 1919. Since that time the sewer system has gradually spread until now it covers about 25 per cent of the town. At the town meeting in March, 1939 the town voted to adopt a resolution making it compulsory to join the sewers. If a sewer is now on the street the home owner has ten years, until 1949, to join. If a new sewer is put in a street the property owners must join at once. The owners must pay thirty per cent of the cost, though they may spread it over a period of ten years and have it placed upon the tax bill. The average cost of connecting the sewer to the property is between twenty and twenty-five dollars.

In addition to laying out new sewers and connecting sewers to houses this department cleans and keeps in working order all of the lines now in operation. Quite often stoppages occur. Sometimes these are due

to nature, such as tree roots breaking a pipe line. Sometimes it is due to defective workmanship. In these cases the department bears the cost of repairs. However, a more frequent cause of stoppage is by people using the sewer for a refuse disposal plant. When all kinds of rubbish, rags, small bottles, etc. are flushed down the sewer it simply does not flow along properly. When necessary to clean out such messes the property owners pay the cost of cleaning. It is cheaper to send such things to the dump!

The rates one pays for use of the sewer is based upon a metered reading of the water passing through the sewer. The average family sewer bill is about ten dollars per year, paid semi-annually.

### *Park Department*

The fourth, and final department, under the supervision of the Board of Public Works is the department of Parks. Reading is fortunate to have so many fine large public parks. These parks have been made available in many cases by donations of land to the town. Memorial Park was given to the town by Reading people with the understanding that it should never be used to play games like football and baseball which attract crowds. There are now fine provisions for tennis, indoor games at the "barn", and it is flooded in part for skating in the winter time.

Washington street playground has long been the location of the baseball and football fields. In recent years it has been graded and beautified. Tennis and quoit courts have been added. Birch Meadow is our largest and most recent park. It was purchased by the town. Originally a large and swampy area which used to be flooded in times past and used by young and old alike for skating parties. It has since been drained and is constantly being improved. There are now available at this park excellent tennis courts with flood lights so that tennis may be played until eleven o'clock at night. There is an ample floodlighted softball diamond there where various community teams have regular summer

games. The smaller children find pleasure in the many different swings, teeter boards, and especially in the wading pool. Adults and young people are more and more enjoying the out-of-door picnic facilities at the park's fireplaces. Indeed, this bids fair to become the major recreational area of the town.

The job of keeping the turf, grass, and equipment of all of these parks falls to the lot of the Park department of the Board of Public Works. Further, this department hires several playground instructors to supervise and assist in the playground programs each summer. These jobs are usually allotted to Reading boys who are going to college and need summer jobs.

Surprising as it may seem, one of the really expensive and yet unaccounted worries of this department is the constant destruction of playground property by young people. Almost every week, and at times almost every night, there are reports of some of the swings being spoiled, lights being stoned out, equipment bent and damaged, fences torn down, etc. The general impression is that this is not done by the youngsters who really use the grounds, but by young men and grown up hoodlums who should know better. Anyone who reports these destructions will be performing a real service to their playmates. Some means must be taken to stop it, or else the town simply will not provide the equipment and the youngsters will go without.

### *Town Dump*

Correctly speaking the dump is not under the supervision of the Board of Public Works, but under the Selectmen. However, as the Selectmen have no equipment to do much of the actual work of taking care of the dump it is done by the Board of Public Works.

In 1938 a By-Law was adopted by the town making it illegal to dump any goods anywhere except at the appointed town dump. Further, rubbish, ashes, etc., must not be transported through the streets of Reading without a permit from the Board of Selectmen. These permits are free.

Such are the duties of the Board of Public Works. The work of this department costs the town between about a third and a fourth of the total expenses of the town. Yet for this money it gets many services.

### *Qualifications for Office*

Candidates who seek the office of Board of Public Works ought to be well trained in the engineering fields, particularly civil engineering. Much of the work of the Board concerns engineering problems. A man without training in engineering would be at a considerable disadvantage in understanding the work and problems of the Board. A contractor also has a desirable background and would be of great value on the Board. It is barely possible that general citizens without special training are useful to get the "layman's" point of view.

No matter what the professional training of the candidate, he ought to be a man of broad civic interest who is willing to put in many extra hours of work. He should attack his job from the point of view of serving the town. There is no room on the Board for men who seek office for the sole purpose of obtaining contracts, or other equally selfish interests. These are not the kind of men who should seek, or should be encouraged to seek public office.

## **3. The School Committee**

### *History*

There is no more interesting story in Reading government than the development of the schools. The following account concerns only the "public" schools and does not take into account the various private schools and academies which from time to time have existed within our township.

The first official school records were in a town meeting of December 8, 1693, when it was voted "that there should be a free school kept in town, and there should be a Rate (tax) of four pounds for a school of three

months: two pounds for the West End (present Reading) and one pound for those that live on the north side of the Ipswich River." In those days, actions were taken by Parishes. The four pounds probably applied to the First Parish, Wakefield.

The first school house within the limits of old Reading was built near the north end of the present Wakefield Common, about where the parsonage of the Congregational Church is located today. There are no records of when, by whom, or how much this school cost. We do know it had a fireplace in one end, and that it was a small school. It was used until 1799.

The first school built in present Reading was located at about the corner of the present Washington and Woburn streets. It, too, was a small one room school. It was built in the year 1708 or thereabout. A Mr. John Webb "was engaged to teach reading, writing, casting accounts, and the Latin and Greek tongues for one whole year for the sum of thirty pounds New England Currency."

Such were the beginnings. Today we are so accustomed to having the control of the schools in the hands of a School Committee which employs trained personnel, that we forget the method of controlling the early schools.

The control of the schools, the appointment of a master or other teachers, the payment of the teachers, and the supervision of the teachers were once in the hands of the Selectmen. Further, the schools were taxed by "districts". Before Reading was divided into townships the governing districts were the various Parishes. So many schools were established in the South Parish; so many in the Wood End Parish, etc. Each district surrounding a school raised the money among themselves to support their own school. It was called the district school tax.

An important change took place in the Wood End Parish when in 1781 they voted to have two school dis-

tricts. This was merely the first of many divisions into school districts, to have the children from walking so far to school. In these early time houses were few and far between, and woods and fields were common.

The early school master was paid very small salaries, but he was a person who was highly respected in the community. He often boarded about from family to family. The master made out fairly well, because the school year was short and he worked at other jobs during the rest of the year. The winter months were the ones in which the schools had the best attendance. The spring and fall months were times when at least the boys had to work on the farms.

The year 1793 saw an important change in the control of our schools. Previous to that time the Selectmen had charge of the schools. Beginning in that year, 1793, there was appointed the first School Committee. Later these committees were elected by the townspeople. At first the committee consisted of three members, and continued to have this number until after the Civil War. In 1868 the School Committee spoke of the difficulty of looking after the activities of the various schools and suggested that more members be appointed. The next year, 1869, the School Committee consisted of nine members, three of whom were women. Later reports indicate that the lady members were especially good in their duties toward the school.

What were the committee members of that time supposed to do? The committee was divided so that each member of the committee really had the supervision of a particular school and the teacher of it. The members were to make visits to the school each year to see that the teacher was getting along well, and that he or she had good discipline. The teacher looked to the committee member for advice and comment on her work, much as she would look to a principal or a superintendent today.

However, nine members of a School Committee seemed too many. The number was, in 1871, reduced to six and it has so remained ever since.

In the meantime other developments were taking place. In the year 1818 the Wood End Parish voted to unite the two school districts into one. The first legal school district meeting was held on May 18, 1818, and there voted the first district school tax. This was the first time our part of Reading had taken such action.

There was a continued demand for a high school beginning as early as 1840. However, since it would be unsatisfactory to build a high school in our village without building one usable to the members of the village in the North Parish, none was built at all. However, after North Reading separated in 1853 this left the way clear to establish a high school.

The first high school in Reading was established in the year 1856. The Center School district of Reading (there were at that time three districts in all) purchased the building called Union Hall and rented this to the town to be used as a high school. The first class graduated from high school in 1863 and consisted of five members.

It was soon evident that this would not be enough. So another important step was taken. Reading voted to build its first high school and it was completed and opened in 1867, and is what we know now as the old Center Street School, standing by the Methodist Church on the Common.

To go back a few years, it is interesting to note that in 1880 there were 4 ungraded schools; 3 primary schools; 2 intermediate schools; and one high school. An ungraded school was sometimes called a mixed school. It had a mixture of all nine grades. There were nine years covered in the elementary schools, and three years of instruction in the high school.

Reading continued to vote money for the schools, though in amounts that we would consider scant. For



example, the total school appropriation in 1870 was \$7,683 and by 1880 the amount was \$8,016.

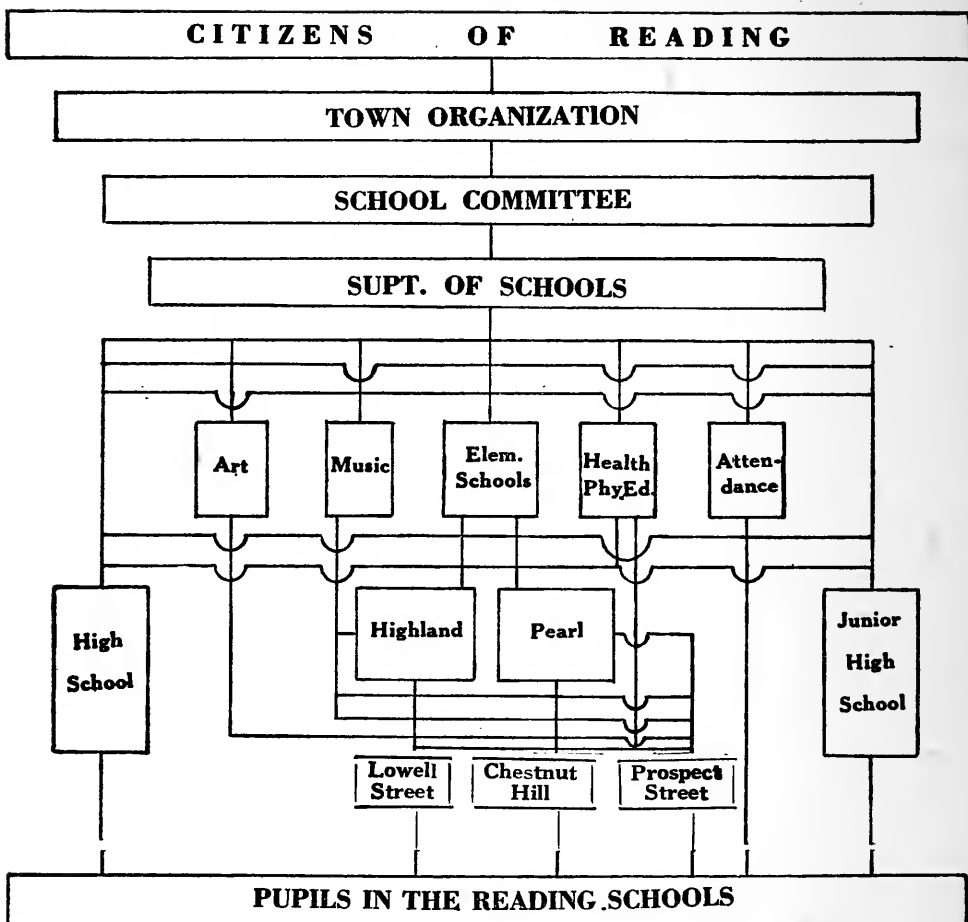
The early town reports show that the only report made by the school committee was to give the detailed expenses of how much was paid the teacher, how much was paid for cordwood, and how much to care for the school, etc. Beginning in 1867 with the building of the new high school building regular and complete committee reports were printed. Some of these reports are worth reading. The finest story of our early schools is contained in the town report of 1867 when the new high school was dedicated.

Finally in 1893, another important step was taken in relation to the government of our schools. That year Reading employed the first Superintendent of Schools. Previously the affairs had been entirely in the hands of the School Committee. State officials, and other towns were gradually finding it better to have a trained man to look after the details of running the schools. The first Superintendent was to give two fifths of his time to the Reading schools, and three fifths to the Wakefield schools. Reading at that time was appropriating about \$10,000 for public school expenses.

Things went along well for a time. Then it was decided to break up the Reading-Wakefield combination of a school superintendent. In its place came a Supervising Principal. This arrangement of a Supervising Principal lasted from 1909 to 1921. At about that time we joined again in a Superintendent Union with North Reading, the Superintendent giving nine tenths of his time to Reading and one tenth to North Reading.

Finally, in 1939 we broke our union with North Reading. In that year was hired the first Superintendent who was to devote his full time to Reading schools alone.

Today the School Committee is made up of six members, each serving three years with their terms so arranged that two new members are normally elected each year. They are elected by vote at the annual town election.



### *Duties of School Committee*

The duties of the School Committee are to have charge of all public schools, including evening and vocational schools. It may also determine, subject to the general state laws, the number of weeks and hours schools shall be in session. The state requires that there shall be at least 160 days of elementary schooling, and 180 days of junior and senior high schooling per year.

The duties of the School Committee are listed in detail in the state laws. Further, other local regulations

and rules have been adopted by our School Committee to better carry out its work. Following are some of the specific duties which are legally given to the School Committee:

1. The School Committee shall appoint a Superintendent and fix his salary. He shall have direct charge of the administration of the schools.
2. The School Committee must appoint a Secretary who shall keep a permanent record of all votes, orders, and proceedings of the meetings. This is usually the Superintendent.
3. The School Committee may elect and contract with teachers for positions in the school system. As a matter of actual practice, the Committee entrusts this to the Superintendent although the Committee formally approves all contracts.
4. The School Committee by a two-thirds vote may dismiss a teacher. If the teacher has taught less than three years no other action is needed. However, if the teacher is on tenure he or she has a right to a public hearing and cannot be dismissed without proven charges.
5. The School Committee may set up special schools, or make special arrangements for cripple children, or children who are bed ridden.
6. The School Committee has supervision of textbooks, but again this is usually left to the teachers and the superintendent.
7. The School Committee employs a school nurse and a school physician or both.
8. The School Committee decides how much transportation will be provided and makes contracts for it.
9. The School Committee decides on locations of new school buildings, subject to the approval of the town by a vote in open town meeting or on the ballot.

10. The School Committee decides what repairs shall be made to school buildings, and what improvements shall be made to school grounds.

The School Committee meetings are held on the first and third Wednesday of each month. They are held at the Grouard House on School street. The Superintendent usually draws up the agenda of matters to be considered at the meeting. Whenever possible he collects and makes available to each member of the Committee as many facts as he can relating to the problems to be discussed. After a presentation and discussion of the facts the Committee makes its decisions by a vote. There is a regular order to the business procedure.

### *Qualifications for Office*

Members of the School Committee should have a broad appreciation and understanding of education. Educational problems today are often difficult, and involved. A study of facts relating to any problem makes for effective decisions. Committee members should have a background of information sufficient to understand the immediate and long range effects of the decisions which they must make.

They should be thoroughly in sympathy with the ideals of democracy, and democracy in education. That means they must have an understanding of how to develop a system of education in the town that develops and trains not only teachers in democracy, but the young people as well.

It is probably wise to look at the make-up of the Committee as a whole. The Committee should represent a cross section of well informed people. They need not all be lawyers, doctors, engineers, or architects. There should be at least one and probably more women members. Whatever the occupational choice, every member should be a person who is really aware of the duties and attitudes of a wise public servant. They must be public servants who are interested in serving for the fun of doing worthwhile things for the community, and plan to meet the material and educational needs of the children. School Committee members are not paid.

## 4. *The Board of Public Welfare*

### *History*

The beginnings of this board go back more than one hundred and fifty years. There were people whom the town had to look after, even in the early 1700's. At that time the problem of what to do with these people was placed in the hands of the Selectmen. In going through the early records there are many instances of the problem being discussed in town meeting. The principal issue was whether the poor and insane should be boarded out, or whether the town should purchase a farm and care for them on that.

There is evidence that these problems were quite important, for in the town records of March 1, 1773 meeting it was voted to choose the Overseers of the Poor separate from the Selectmen. The Moderator appointed five Overseers.

The problem of looking after the poor then was quite different from the problem of the Board of Public welfare today. Then, the insane and the poor were kept together in the same place, or boarded out among the various people of the town. Further, the names of all the people who were receiving public relief support were printed in the town reports and the amount expended upon each, a cruel and unnecessary way of treating the unfortunate. This practice is still carried on in some of the states.

For many years the poor and other unfortunates were cared for by being boarded out to various people in town, the town paying the expense. However, in 1854 the so-called Town Farm on Pearl street was purchased and used for that purpose. About this time, or a little later, the insane people were sent to state or county institutions, thus wisely being separated from the others. The Town Farm was often referred to as the almshouse. In the year 1911 Reading voted to close it up and board the inmates out again.

As previously indicated the Overseers of the Poor were separated from the Selectmen in 1773. However, this duty soon returned to that Board by a state law passed in 1785. For many years the title "Overseers of the Poor" was included in the duties of the Selectmen. Finally, in 1909, it was decided again to have a separate board, Overseers of the Poor. This time they were elected by the people. There was created a board of three members. This organization lasted until 1924, when the town adopted by vote a new board called the Board of Public Welfare. This board had vastly increased powers and duties over the older one.

### *Duties*

The Board of Public Welfare today consists of three members, each elected for a term of three years, so arranged that one new member is elected each year. The Board has the following duties:

1. To receive all applications for relief; to investigate; to grant relief where needed and to deny it where not needed; to see that relief is continued so long as necessary and to discontinue relief immediately when no longer necessary.
2. To appoint a Superintendent who shall have charge of the details of administering the work of the Board of Public Welfare.
3. To see that the laws of the state and federal governments in relation to old age assistance, children's aid, and the relief of the needy are carried out.
4. To make general policies for the care of the needy.
5. To act as certifying agent for the C. C. C., the National Youth Administration, and the W.P.A.

The duties are simple, but the detail involved to carry out the duties is tremendous. For example, there are some fifty different forms which must be filled out and returned to the various state and federal agencies. In addition, all bills to other towns for the relief of their citizens who are on our relief load must be properly filled out and mailed. All of this work must be

done, or we will not receive the federal or state aid due to us, or the rebates from other towns to which we are entitled.

Until recently the meetings of the Board were largely concerned with case records of families who were applying for one of the many forms of government aid. It has just been made the policy of the department to delegate the details of deciding what action to take upon individual requests for aid to the Superintendent of Public Welfare. The Board meetings will be able to devote more time and attention to general broad problems facing the Welfare department. This is in keeping with good administrative practice.

Whether or not one will qualify for aid depends upon whether or not the person who is seeking aid meets the various regulations which have been passed. There are a great many people who are misinformed on the work of this office, so it seems wise to explain it somewhat.

There are three kinds of aid. They are:

1. General aid — relief.
2. Old Age Assistance.
3. Children's aid.

Under general aid comes people, who for one reason or another, are unemployed and have no further savings with which to continue. These people may apply for general aid. This may be granted, but before doing so there is a thorough check-up of the family as to place of residence, former employer, number in family etc. Once aid is granted it is based upon the budget needs of the family. These budgets have been very carefully worked out and it is expected families will follow them as closely as possible. There are only two kinds of decisions to make in these cases. One is, shall the person seeking aid be required to work for the things which he has been given. The second is, shall aid be given to him in goods, or in cash. These are questions the Board decides, with the advice and help of the Superintendent.

The *Old Age Assistance* law went into effect in Massachusetts in 1931. At first there was no financial

provision for supporting it. Thus, in 1931 there was assessed an extra dollar poll tax to raise funds. Now, however, it comes out of general state funds. Under this provision, any citizen who reaches 65, who has resided in Massachusetts five years out of the last nine, and who is *in need* may apply for Old Age Assistance. The year preceding the application the one who applies must have a year of unbroken residence in the state. This includes single men, single women, and man and wife. This aid may be granted. If the people own property beyond the value of three thousand dollars they must assign all over that amount to the town. The support of these people is paid in part by the state, in part by the federal government, and in part by the town. This aid must be paid in cash with no restrictions whatsoever, a requirement of the United States Social Security law.

Finally, under *Aid to Dependent Children* we have still another set-up. Children whose means of support is taken away from them have direct aid. This does not necessarily mean the loss of one or both parents. The Board must decide on the fitness of the parent, or of the guardian to administer the aid. Here again, the state pays part, the federal government pays part, and the town pays part of the expenses. The aid must be given in cash.

In order to put the cost of the support of these groups where it belongs, it is necessary to keep a very detailed set of facts about each case. For example, if some of the cases on General Aid have a residence out of town for a certain number of years it is possible to bill that town for the amount of aid granted to those cases. The repayment from other towns runs into thousands of dollars each year, so it is very important to keep the records straight.

The decision of the local Board of Public Welfare is not binding. Old Age Assistance cases may appeal. A person may appeal his case on certain grounds to a higher referee. The referee's decision is binding, both on the town and on the recipient. Under General Relief there is no appeal from the ruling of the Board.



Thus, it is clearly established that the Board of Public Welfare has clear cut and established legal duties in the administering of the various forms of relief. It is not a question of whether or not a town ought to give relief. They are legally compelled to do so under certain conditions.

### *Qualifications for Office*

Candidates for this office should not approach this problem with the idea that they are going to cut the expenditures and reduce them to a very small amount. In the first place, a little more than half of the expenditures are legally provided for in such legislation as the Social Security Act, which went into effect in 1936. In the second place, expenditures under general relief seem likely to remain high whenever there is a period of depression. Further, there will always be some burden of this nature to bear. Experts now believe that roughly ten per cent of the people must be supported by this method.

Candidates for this office ought to have a broad background and training dealing with people and social problems. They must be prepared to spend many long hours at work, for most of the problems are not vague problems, but are definite cases which must be decided on definite facts and issues. They should be people who are able to judge personalities, and be able to decide when cases are a real need and when something is being put over on them. Finally, they should approach the problems of some of these people as real people who want to be useful citizens, but who are temporarily unfortunate enough to be out of work. Candidates should have the spirit of wanting to help them rebuild their life and help them once more get on their feet, where they may continue by themselves as useful and contributing members of the community.

The last thing in the world that is wanted in this office is the kind of person who is out to "get somebody" or who expects to secure personal profit by forcing these people to buy goods from them.

## 5. THE MUNICIPAL LIGHT BOARD

### *History*

The Municipal Light Board originated in 1894 and made its first report in that year, a report of progress. The beginnings of this board are interesting. Electricity was not used and sold in town before 1890. In 1891 a Massachusetts state law was passed which gave towns the right to organize a municipal electric light plant. The next year some interested citizens inserted an article in the Warrant of the town meeting to see whether or not a committee should be appointed to investigate the possibilities of the Town of Reading securing a municipal light plant. At that meeting there was considerable discussion. Finally, a Committee of Three was appointed by the Moderator to "ascertain and report to the town the best and most economical system of lighting by electricity, with a detailed plan of a plant such as will meet the wants of the town."

This first Committee of Three of 1892 met and did considerable work. They made a report to the town six months later. Apparently all were not satisfied with this report for another committee was appointed. They in turn reported to the town meeting in March, 1894. This committee stated the following, a revised form of their original. "We wish to state the views we have expressed before, namely that the town should adhere to its position that no private corporation should be allowed to obtain control of the business of furnishing light for the Town or its inhabitants."

The Town then appointed another Committee of Three to make a more detailed report within six months. In the meantime on May 21, 1894, after a proper article was inserted in the Warrant, it was voted by a standing vote (185 for 0 against) that "the Town do establish an Electric Light and Power Plant within the Town in accordance with Chapter 370 of the Acts of 1891."

The second Committee of Three reported in July in 1894. They had great difficulties in getting exact information as no engineers or firms would give out information to the Committee as they did not have the power to make a contract, and because the Town had not voted any definite sums to carry on the work. Nevertheless, this Committee went ahead and secured what information they could and made a report. The important facts of the report follow:

1. The Committee was completely agreed that a plant should be built, and built, at once—1894.
2. It should be build now because it could be done cheaper than it could when business revived and prices went up. The Town must borrow the money by issuing bonds. Money could be borrowed at that time cheaper than it could later when business might improve.
3. The streets are poorly lighted. If the Town hoped to attract new residents this condition must be improved.
4. If private corporations can make money in electric lighting, why cannot a town furnish lights for streets, public buildings, and to its citizens at less cost than a company could, or would do it.
5. The greatest cause of costly failures in other towns had been due to the use of cheap equipment. Whatever we do, we want good equipment.

So it was that the Municipal Light Plant was established. It was established by permission of Massachusetts state laws, and by direct vote of the people in town meeting. Incidentally, we know that there were over seven hundred eligible voters, yet only 185 were counted at the meeting. A small number for such an important step.

The Municipal Light Board was set up by state laws to have charge of the Municipal Light Plant. In relation to this the laws of the state specify the follow-

ing conditions which are taken from Chapter 164 of the General Laws, sections 55 and 56. Parts of the wording not important to the meaning are left out. These laws say:

“A Town which has established or votes to establish a gas or electric plant may elect a Municipal Light Board consisting of three citizens of the town, one of whom shall be chosen for one year, one for two years, and one for three years, and at each annual meeting thereafter one for a term of three years, WHO SHALL HAVE AUTHORITY TO CONSTRUCT, PURCHASE, or LEASE a gas or electric plant in accordance with THE VOTE of the Town. and to maintain and operate the same.

“. . . . The Municipal Light Board of a town acquiring gas or electric plant shall appoint a Manager of the municipal lighting or shall, UNDER THE DIRECTION AND CONTROL OF THE BOARD have full charge of the operation and management of the plant, the manufacture and distribution of gas or electricity, the purchase of supplies, the employment of servants or agents, the method, time, price and quantity and quality of the supply, collection of bills, and the keeping of accounts . . . . His compensation shall be fixed by the Municipal Light Board . . . . All monies payable to or received by the Municipal Light Board in connection with the operation of the plant shall be paid to the Town Treasurer . . . . All accounts rendered or kept in the gas or electric plant of any city shall be subject to the inspection of the city auditor, or person having similar duties, and in towns shall be subject to the inspection of the Selectmen.”

These are the conditions under which Reading organized a Municipal Light Plant, under the supervision of a Municipal Light Board. It built an operating plant off Ash Street and opened service to the public on September 26, 1895. For many years the plant enlarged

and sold increasingly larger amounts of electricity to the townspeople.

In 1908 another act was passed by the Legislature which permitted our Municipal Light Plant to conduct business in North Reading, Wilmington, and in Lynnfield Center. The dealings with those towns and their townspeople were to be conducted by our plants just as though it was a private company. The cost of electricity in these towns is slightly higher than it is in Reading. There is also a provision that if those towns ever build a municipal light plant our town must sell its properties to them at a fair value.

The sale of electricity increased considerably. From time to time new additions were made to the plant. Finally, there came a time when it was necessary either to make a major enlargement of the plant or we would have to purchase electricity from the outside to supply our needs. There were many differences of opinion upon the course of action to take. It is interesting to note that nine town meetings were held in a comparatively short time to discuss the situation. It was finally decided to buy the electricity.

Since 1929 we have not used our power plant, though it is constantly kept in good shape in case of an emergency. We have purchased our power recently from the Boston Edison Company. This power is furnished to us by this scheme cheaper than it would be if all of the individual citizens were connected directly with this company's lines and dealt individually with it.

The Municipal Light Plant has an annual income of over three hundred thousand dollars, about two-thirds of which is from Reading proper. The Plant has an average of fifty or more employees. It is also interesting to know that in 1940 all but three of the houses in Reading were connected for electric service.

The Plant has moved its offices from time to time. Its executive offices have been in the Masonic Building, in the Municipal Building, and in two different build-

ings on Main street near the Reading Theatre. They are now in a building which was built in 1939 for the purpose of housing the Municipal Light Plant's offices.

### *Duties*

The Municipal Light Board is a very important board, yet strange to say, its personnel has not changed greatly over the past few years. In fact there have been fewer changes in this board than in almost any other single elective board in the community.

The Municipal Light Board consists of three members who are elected by the townspeople in their annual elections. Each member serves for three years, but their terms are so staggered that one new member is elected each year. They meet once a month at the offices in the Municipal Light Building on Haven street. The meetings are open to the public for those who wish to attend.

The duties of the Board are:

1. To construct, purchase, or lease plants for the manufacture or sale of electricity, according to the vote of the town. This requires a two thirds vote if bonds or notes are issued.
2. To operate and maintain the electric light plant and offices.
3. To appoint a Manager of the plant and fix his salary.
4. To be responsible for the reports which go to the Public Utilities Department at Boston, a state board.
5. To see to it that the books are audited and checked by an accountant for accuracy.
6. To determine where new equipment shall be developed and placed.
7. To be responsible to the townspeople and to the State Department of Public Utilities for the conduct of the business of the Municipal Light Plant.
8. To fix and to develop general policies of the Plant.

The first mentioned duty is limited by law. If the Board wishes to make any major change it must put an article in the Warrant and bring it to the attention of the voters. At the town meeting it must secure a two thirds vote of those present to carry out their plans if bonds or notes are to be issued. After the permission has been secured, it is the duty of the Board to supervise the activities as a whole, though the details are left to the Manager of the Municipal Light Plant.

The duty of operating and maintaining the light plant and offices is a technical one. Most of the details are left entirely to the Manager, though of course the Board must assume the obligation of being responsible to the Town for them.

The Manager of the Municipal Light Plant is an important position. He has direct supervision over a large plant; he supervises the daily work of a crew of some fifty workers. He must be thoroughly familiar with the operation of the plant, with the developments and improvement in electrical equipment. He must secure the active co-operation of other Boards in laying out wires under streets, and in carrying out other duties.

In actual practice it is the responsibility of the Manager to keep records and make reports of the doings of the Plant. However, there are two other important angles that many people do not know about. First, the Municipal Light Board and all of its financial reports are under the supervision of the State Board of Public Utilities in Boston. The State Board sets up certain very definite requirements in the way the books of the Plant shall be kept. The Plant must meet these regulations. Secondly, the Municipal Light Board itself must make an annual report to the citizens of Reading, to whom they are directly responsible.

For several years it has been the practice of the Municipal Light Board to secure an outside agency to audit its books. Its books by law must receive an annual audit. In the early days they were audited by the Town Auditor or the Town Accountant, but this is no longer

true. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Board to secure the services of a reliable firm to make an annual audit.

Such are the duties of the Municipal Light Board.

### *Qualifications for Office*

What are the qualifications of men who should seek this office? They should be men of business experience and excellent judgment, because the efficiency and wisdom with which they do things is reflected in the cost of distributing electricity. If electricity is not produced and distributed efficiently the price will be likely to rise, or it will not be lowered when it ought to be. Thus, people may pay a heavy tax in the form of excessively high rates.

In selecting membership to the Board it would be well for the voters to consider the make-up of the Board as a whole. It seems likely that men with advanced engineering training would be a valuable asset to the Board. Likewise a trained accountant would be very useful in interpreting the practices of the Board to the public. Perhaps a contractor or general business man would be a fine candidate.

Whatever other qualifications they may have, the candidates should be people of real ability and interested in government. They should be men of outstanding character who will work first and foremost in the public interest. Many of the decisions which this Board makes can effect the justice with which the people of the town are treated in determining where the "surplus" funds shall be used. The wisdom with which those decisions are made depends to a large extent upon the public interest of the members of the Board.

### *Summary of Major Boards*

This completes the survey of the five major Boards in Reading. These five Boards probably handle more than 90 percent of the total expenses of the town. In all cases they have a large personnel, and make many major decisions affecting town welfare. Their duties and responsibilities should be familiar to all.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **The Development and Duties of the Minor Town Boards**

#### 1. THE BOARD OF HEALTH

The Board of Health is a fairly recent board. The first mention of such a board was in 1889 when it was listed as a part of the duties of the Board of Selectmen. They had the power to appoint a health officer. Two years later, in 1891, the townspeople elected their first separate Board of Health at the annual town election. It consisted of three members. The first report was made in 1892.

Today the Board is made up of three members, each elected for a term of three years. Their terms are so arranged that only one new member is elected each year. The Board meets every week at the Municipal Building.

The duties of the Board of Health are:

1. To make a report once a week to the State Department of Public Health, giving a list of all deaths from diseases declared to be dangerous to public health.
2. To make regulations for the promotion and continuance of healthful conditions within the town.
3. To appoint a plumbing inspector, a milk inspector, and a Health Officer.
4. To issue certain licenses and permits.
5. To establish and maintain a sanitary station near the center of town. It is at the Police Station.
6. To see that the vaccination laws are enforced.
7. To have charge of quarantine and isolation of certain diseases.
8. To receive notices from physicians and from citizens of the presence of diseases in families.

9. To provide for the inspection of bakeries, milk, and other food manufacturing or food dispensing agencies.
10. To see that owners of property keep their property cleaned up free of rubbish, cesspool leaks, and other waste so as not to be places where diseases will breed.
11. To hold investigations of complaints of the citizens upon any of the matters brought to their attention.

It is plain that the Board of Health has a great deal of authority. This authority is definitely given to it by state law, and by local regulations which have the force of By-laws. For example, under duties number 2 and number 10 one finds very general statements, yet under these general statements are very broad powers. If one keeps tin cans, garbage and other refuse around his back yard the Board of Health has authority to make that person clean it up. They can take the case to court and compel the owner to keep his place in a reasonable condition.

The Board of Health has authority to grant or refuse to grant permits for licenses to sell and distribute food. Any place which manufactures food such as bread, milk, jam, vegetables must keep their places of business up to reasonable standards of cleanliness. The milk inspector regularly inspects barns and the milk sold from local dealers or others to determine how much dirt and other matter is in the milk which should not be. If the dirt count is too high, he has the authority to make the owner clean up and remedy the situation. If the owner refuses to do so his license will be taken away from him.

The Board of Health has complete authority in all cases which relate to the control of diseases. They may require that people be taken from the home and sent to an isolation hospital; they may post quarantine signs which can only be removed by permission of the Board; they may even request the police to guard a home to see that no one enters or leaves.

## *Qualifications for Office*

It is required by law that one of the members of the Board of Health shall be a physician. For several years there have been two and even three physicians on the Board. It seems likely, however, that it might be well to have other public spirited citizens on the Board.

People who are candidates for this Board should have a courageous spirit of community welfare. The Board has considerable power. The power must be used so as to cause no great harm to any one person, family or small group, yet it must be used for the general good of all. If the members wish to set high standards of health conduct and living in our community they will often need to make decisions which will force people to clean up their premises. The public interest demands that candidates who will make such decisions hold this office.

## 2. THE PLANNING BOARD

### *History*

The Planning Board is a comparatively new board. The idea of planning boards has an interesting history. Shortly after 1905 several towns saw the need of planning their growth more carefully in order not to develop in a hodge-podge manner. Some towns developed the idea of making zoning laws which would restrict certain parts of the town to residential sections and certain parts to business sections. The Supreme Court, around 1908 found these measures unconstitutional. Later, the state adopted a constitutional amendment approving the idea of town zoning. In 1913 the state passed a law authorizing towns to set up Planning Boards to provide for zoning and other laws. This law has since been amended, particularly in 1914 and in 1936.

The Reading Planning Board was voted in a town meeting on March 15, 1915. The Board organized under the state law of 1914 which reads as follows:

“Every city of the commonwealth, and every town having a population of more than ten thousand at

the last state or national census is authorized and directed to create a board . . . to be known as a Planning Board, whose duty it shall be to make careful studies of the resources, possibilities, and needs of the town, particularly with respect to conditions which may be injurious to public health . . . and to make plans for the development of the town with special reference to the proper housing of the people . . . In towns the members of the board shall be elected by voters at the annual town meeting. They are to make an annual report to the town."

The Reading Planning Board was first set up in 1917. Its five members are elected by the town. Each member serves three years, but their terms are so arranged that no more than two members are elected each year. They hold regular weekly meetings at the Municipal Building.

### *Duties*

The Planning Board's chief purpose is to make plans for the wise development of the town. They plan improvements in public property, and they make plans for the development of private property as it may effect public welfare. Their duties lie in the direction of developing desirable plans for the town to adopt. They suggest these improvements to various boards or the voters directly. They have no power to compel acceptance of their plans.

One gets a much better picture of their duties by studying the work which the Planning Board has done than by merely listing its duties. The duties are clear—"to make careful studies of the resources, possibilities, and needs of the town."

What does the Board actually do? Following are listed several projects which the members have studied, and on which they have made definite suggestions to the town or to some town board.

1. The members of the Board have developed a master plan for future development of Reading,

listing the areas which are desirable to be set aside as parks, as residential areas, and as business areas, etc.

2. They have made a survey of the traffic and parking problem in and around Reading Square.
3. They have made plans for the development of Birch Meadow.
4. They make plans for the development of new streets and parks.
5. They have considered various routes and problems of the proposed by-pass for Route 28, and for the Andover turnpike.
6. They have developed under their supervision a large colored map twelve by eight feet which gives in detail the physical features of Reading. It shows all of the contours at five foot intervals. This map project alone cost \$40,000 and was completed as a Federal aid project.
7. They have considered and put before the town a new zoning law.
8. They attend Hearings of the Board of Appeal to speak against cases which are a violation of the town zoning laws.

### *Qualifications for Office*

The voters, in considering candidates for this Board, will do well to consider the make-up of the Board as a whole. It ought to have people serving on it who have the long range point of view. It would seem well to have on it men of quiet varied training such as an engineer, an architect, a contractor, a business man, a lawyer, and a public-spirited citizen of general civic interests. It is a Board that needs balance, and ability to think in terms of the future. The members should be able to sense public sentiment so as to know when to push certain of their projects and get them accepted when the public is in a receptive mood to that project. Men should not be placed upon this Board who are impatient and wish to do things immediately. By the very nature of the work, the Board makes plans for the distant future.

### 3. THE PUBLIC LIBRARY TRUSTEES

#### *History*

So far as one can learn, the first library in this part of the old town of Reading was established September 27, 1796. It was known as the Federal Library. It was not a public library, but was owned by an association of 60 members. Right of membership cost \$1.00 per year at first, though it was later increased to \$2.00 per year. In addition each member had to pay annual dues of twenty-five cents per year. The library lasted some thirty-five years. There are no records of it after 1830. The books were sold at auction on January 24, 1831.

The second library in town, the Franklin Library, organized in January of 1842. This was similar to the first in that it was a private association of members with a \$2.00 membership charge and with annual dues of fifty cents. This library continued for about thirty years, when in 1869 its members voted to turn their books over to the public library.

Just before the Civil War, in 1860, there was formed an Agricultural Library Association which had a small membership and a very limited supply of books. These likewise were turned over to the public library in 1869.

The Reading Public Library was established in 1867 when Horace P. Wakefield offered to give \$500 for a library if the Town would vote a like amount. It was so voted in 1868. The library, the first public library in Reading, opened on February 17, 1869 in what was then the high school building. It has been known more recently as the Center Street School.

The Reading Public Library has had a wandering career. It has moved seven different times. The most serious disaster occurred when it was in the Odd Fellows Hall. There a fire, on November 27, 1911, destroyed about one third of the books. Of course it had to move to new quarters.

After 1910 there was a widespread movement throughout the country to establish libraries and library

buildings by using the Andrew Carnegie funds. Between 1910 and 1917 there were several attempts by supporters of a public library to get the townspeople to accept these funds, provide the land and build a library. Like all good causes it took many years before the seed finally germinated. Finally, in 1918 action came. The Carnegie Fund contributed \$15,000 and the townspeople voted to buy a site and build a suitable building. The present building was completed and opened on July 13, 1918 at a cost of \$20,000. It has served the town well.

Since the establishment of the Public Library it has been governed by a Board of Trustees. It consists of six members, each serving three years with their terms so arranged that only two new members are elected in any one year.

### *Duties*

The duties of the Trustees of the Public Library are:

1. To engage a librarian and assistants.
2. Approve all bills for expenditure of books, re-binding, salaries, and upkeep.
3. Decide how to maintain peace and order in the library.
4. Decide how the money from the Trust Funds shall be spent.
5. Decide such questions as shall a new desk be purchased which is especially arranged for the conduct of library work.
6. Make decisions as to whether or not to increase the fiction or non fiction sections of the library with the limited funds with which they must work.

### *Qualifications for Office*

Candidates for the office of Trustee of the Public Library should have an especially wide educational background. They should be interested in books themselves, yet broad enough to realize that all people do not like the particular type of book that they like. They ought to believe in their cause and be willing to go to bat for it, because the budget is all too small already.

## 4. THE BOARD OF ASSESSORS

### *History*

The present Board of Assessors, like so many other town boards, had its beginnings long ago. It was early a part of the duties of the Board of Selectmen to act as Assessors. Even in the very earliest years of our town, records were kept which indicated how much land and property a person possessed. The rates which were made for the support of the minister were based upon these property holdings. It was the duty of the Assessors to keep the records of these property holdings.

Years later, as the town grew and expenditures of the town increased, the task of keeping the records of property ownership became more difficult. Although still under the supervision of the Selectmen the job was usually assigned to the chairmanship of one of the Selectmen.

Finally, in 1930 appears to be the first separation of the Board of Assessors from the Selectmen. Today the two boards are entirely separate. The Board consists of three members, each elected for three years. The Board meets in the Municipal Building every week.

### *Duties*

The duties of the Board of Assessors are:

1. To place a value on all real estate and personal property as of January first of each year. There must be a revaluation of all property at least every seven years, a job that takes several months.
2. The valuations are brought back to the Assessors office and there the clerks write what are known as the valuation books containing the names of all property owners and the value of their property.
3. To figure all excise taxes.
4. To employ clerks and assistants to carry out their duties.



5. To figure all betterments. For example, if someone has a new sidewalk the Board of Public Works give the amount of money to be charged to the property owner. The Assessors figure out how much will go on his tax bill each year.
6. To handle all abatements, and applications for abatements. If a person feels that he has been charged too much for taxes—his land and property have been value too high—he may file an application with the Board to have his property revalued. If he is not satisfied with the ruling of the Board he may take it to Court.
7. To keep a plan of many of the property lots. If one wishes to know exactly the layout and distances, and the neighbors of a certain lot, one may go to the Assessor's office and secure this information.
8. The Assessors keep a record of all males in Reading twenty years old and over as a list to use to assess a poll tax. It makes no difference whether one is a citizen or an alien the two dollar poll tax must be paid by men.
9. To keep a list of all dogs which is given to the Town Clerk.
10. To figure the tax rate. This is done by finding the total appropriations voted in town meeting which must be met from the local tax levy and divide this into the total value of all personal and real property.
11. To notify other towns of residents who are living in this town but who are subject to pay poll taxes in other towns.
12. To assess state and county taxes.
13. To notify the Town Accountant of all tax abatements.

## *Qualifications for Office*

Candidates for this office should be alert business men with a very keen understanding of real estate and land values. They should be men who are of unquestionable character, for by giving a low value to a piece of property and a high value to another one can show great favoritism. They must be men who are aware of the shift in values which takes place in all towns over a period of years, and to take account of this in making their valuations. They should be men who are thoroughly familiar with the principles of assessing property, a qualification that all too few candidates possess.

## 5. TRUSTEES OF READING CEMETERIES

### *History*

Reading has two town cemeteries. The Laurel Hill Cemetery is the older. It was first in the hands of the Parish church. The care, planning, and sale of lots was a church affair. However, in July 12, 1853, the Old South Church Parish voted to give to the Town of Reading the cemetery of the "old burying ground." Since that time it has been in the hands of a Cemetery Committee, which was later called Trustees of the Cemeteries. In 1924 the town voted to purchase the land for the Forest Glen Cemetery, and began to develop it the following year in 1925. Recent developments, with the aid of W. P. A. funds, have greatly improved the land. Many thousands of dollars of saleable lots have been established.

### *Duties*

The duties of the Trustees of the Cemeteries are:

1. To appoint a Superintendent of Cemeteries and see to it that he carries out his duties which are:
  - a. to make over lots.
  - b. to keep records of the sale of lots.

- c. to see that all lots get proper care.
  - d. to maintain roads through the cemeteries.
  - e. to put in foundations for monuments.
  - f. to have general supervision of the cemeteries.
  - g. to keep plans of lots up to date.
2. To provide for suitable lands for cemeteries within the town.
  3. To work out plans for special improvements such as the W. P. A. project in the Forest Glen Cemetery.

### *Qualifications for Office*

It is likely that a landscape gardener, architects, and general contractors would make good candidates for this office.

## 5. THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

### *History*

This committee is relatively recent in Reading history, yet Reading seems to have been ahead of the general run of Massachusetts towns in setting up such a committee.

As early as 1894 there was an article in the Town Warrant "to see if the town will choose a committee to consider all appropriations recommended by the departments before the annual meeting." There was appointed by the Selectmen a "Citizens Committee on Appropriations" which consisted of twelve citizens. They published their first report in 1894. A similar article was regularly placed in the Town Warrant for a few years, and just as regularly the committee was appointed. The membership of the committee changed. Some years there were twelve members, and other years there were fifteen. All members were appointed by the Selectmen and were citizens and voters in the town, but not office holders.

The Appropriation Committee, in 1902, was changed to the Finance Committee with a membership of fifteen to be appointed by the Selectmen. Since the

state did not pass a law setting up conditions under which towns could establish Finance Committees until 1910, it would seem that Reading was ahead of times in this respect.

Chapter 39, Section 16 of the state laws of 1910 provides the legal basis under which our present Finance Committee is founded. It states:

“Every town whose valuation for the state exceeds one million dollars, and any other town may, by by-law, provide for the appointment and duties of appropriation, advisory or finance committees, who shall consider any or all municipal questions for the purpose of making reports or recommendations to the town . . . . Committees so appointed may continue in office for terms not exceeding three years from date of appointment.”

The first committees, called a “Citizens Committee on Appropriation,” published reports which have been preserved and bound. This practice was in effect from 1894 until shortly after 1900. For some years after 1900 there is no record of any such reports, and there are no formal reports printed in the Chronicle. Thus, it is probable that the reports were given orally in the Town Meeting as each question was brought to the floor. In 1922 the Finance Committee again began publication of its report, and they have been regularly bound and kept. These reports give the recommendation of the Finance Committee on each financial question before the Town Meeting. The people may or may not accept the suggestions of this Committee.

The Finance Committee and the Planning Board are the only boards which may be considered co-ordinating boards. It is the duty of the Finance Committee to go over the proposed expenditures each year and determine whether or not such expenditures are wise at that time. The Committee in making its decisions considers the general effect on the tax rate. It also considers

whether the proposed new developments should be accepted at that particular time.

The Finance Committee holds its first meeting for organization in April, but it does not begin its real heavy work until about January first, except in case of special town meetings. At that time, every board and department of the town must submit to the Finance Committee a detailed statement of their budgets for the coming year. The Committee studies these budgets; it holds hearings; it makes recommendations to approve or to cut out certain items. They are suggestions only and are not compulsory. If the Board, whose budget has been cut, wishes to go on the floor of the Town Meeting and take the issue directly to the voters it may do so.

Today the Finance Committee consists of fifteen members, appointed by the Selectmen. Their terms are arranged in groups of three, each group serving three years and there being five members in each group. The Town Accountant is an Ex-Officio member of the Committee.

### *Duties*

1. The Finance Committee to meet at the call of the Town Accountant within fifteen days after appointment and shall organize for the year.
2. The Finance Committee shall issue complete and clear reports upon all investigations.
3. The Finance Committee may have majority and minority reports.
4. The Finance Committee may secure from each department a detailed statement of the department's proposed budget for the next year.
5. The Finance Committee may hold hearings to get facts.
6. The Finance Committee makes estimates of the probable tax rates.

7. The Finance Committee has authority at any time at the request of thirty persons on a signed petition to investigate the books, accounts, and records of any office or department of the town.

### *Qualifications for Office*

Members of the Finance Committee are appointed by the Selectmen. They may not be members of any department receiving a salary from the town, nor can they be a town officer. They must be voters in the town.

Members of this Committee should have a keen sense of wise civic development. Their decisions weigh greatly in town meetings. Therefore, they must be men who consider proposed expenditures from the broad point of view, and not only the immediate effect.

The Selectmen have a great responsibility in choosing the men to serve on this Committee. It would be unwise to "pack" it with members of one type of training, or from a certain residential district. It must be a truly representative committee of the town's citizens.

## 6. THE LAW COMMITTEE

Even in the early colonial times there were often important legal questions which came before the town. Sometimes these questions were brought before the Town Meeting, and a committee was appointed to look after them. The committee was given full legal power to act for the Town. For example, someone might sue the town for damage caused by poor roads, or there might be a dispute between this town and a neighboring town over the expenses of repairs to a bridge which was on the border line over a river. In such a case a committee was appointed to look after the affair and to arrive at a settlement for the town.

The Selectmen had the power to secure the services of a lawyer to carry on legal work. However, in any

expenditure of large amounts the final decision had to be referred to a town meeting.

Finally, a state law was passed making it possible to set up a Law Committee which would have charge of the legal affairs of the town. The Law Committee of Reading consists of six members, each being the chairman of a town board. The following persons make up the Law Committee.

1. Chairman of the Board of Selectmen.
2. Chairman of the Board of Public Works.
3. Chairman of the Municipal Light Board.
4. Chairman of the School Committee.
5. Chairman of the Board of Assessors.
6. Chairman of the Board of Health.

This is another Board which is not elected. The men who are Chairman of the above boards are automatically on the Law Committee. The duties of the Law Committee are:

1. To choose before the 15th of April of each year a good lawyer to act as Town Counsel.
2. This Committee, through the Town Counsel, shall have authority to prosecute and defend the interests of the Town in all legal affairs in which the Town may be involved.
3. In event there is not time enough to appoint a Town Counsel, the Committee itself has the power to act.
4. The Law Committee has authority to settle all disputes which shall involve not more than \$200. If it is more than that the matter must be brought before the Town Meeting.

The duties of the Law Committee have grown considerably. Most of the responsibility has been placed

in the hands of the Town Counsel. He is appointed by the Committee for a term of one year. His salary is determined by vote of the Town Meeting, and has been one thousand dollars per year. For this sum he is obliged to handle all legal affairs for the town that are referred to him. Under certain circumstances, if the case is long and drawn out and mean a great deal of extra time additional sums may be granted to him.

The duties of the Town Counsel are:

1. To make out all bonds, deeds, leases, and other similar matters of the town. If the town buys or sells a piece of property, he sees that it is legally carried out.
2. To give an opinion to any board who wishes it on any legal matter. For example, if the School Committee wished to turn the old Center Street School into a recreation hall, would it be legal to do so? Are there any quirks in the deed to prevent it?
3. To furnish any legal information to any town officer who asks for it in the interests of the town.
4. To prosecute and defend the town in all cases which may be brought before the courts.
5. To make investigation of injuries and property damage which are reported to him by the police and for which the town might be liable for damages. He must make reports on these investigations to the Law Committee.
6. To prosecute any violation of the By-Laws of the town.
7. To make an annual report to the Law Committee.



## 7. THE BOARD OF APPEAL

This board consists of three members appointed by the Selectmen for the purpose of giving the citizens of the town an opportunity to have some place to take their grievances against ruling of the Selectmen in granting or failing to grant permits, especially as they relate to the building laws of the town. A person dissatisfied with the Selectmen's decision on his petition to build a gasoline station may file an appeal with the Board of Appeal and obtain a hearing. The decision of the Board of Appeal is not final and binding, because it may be taken to the courts. This committee has had relatively little work to do in recent years.

## 8. THE INSURANCE COMMITTEE

There is a committee of five members which handle the insurance on all town-owned buildings and property. This committee is set up by by-law and consists of the following people.

1. All members of the Board of Selectmen. The Chairman of the Board of Selectmen acts as Chairman of the Insurance Committee.
2. Chairman of the Finance Committee.
3. Town Treasurer.

The duty of this committee is to see that all town property is properly covered by insurance. Some years ago this was done by having an individual policy on each piece of property. Today we have what is called blanket insurance. All town property is insured under a few policies.

### *Summary*

The eight boards or committees mentioned in this chapter are not great spenders of money, but they are very important boards in determining general policies of the town. The fact that they are termed "minor"

boards should not lead one to believe that it does not make much difference who holds office. Government is efficient only when the most capable men for the office in the town run and are elected. Slackness in the Board of Health can be quite as bad for the townspeople as slackness in the Board of Selectmen. Unfair valuations by a Board of Assessors may be just as disastrous to just government as politics in the School Committee. Further, great men have made minor boards do wonders for the town.

## Chapter Eight

### THE INDIVIDUAL TOWN OFFICES

#### *Introduction*

This chapter deals with two types of offices. The first are elective offices, while the second are important appointive offices.

By and large the attitude of the townspeople toward the single elective offices seems to be different than their attitude toward the boards. It has been the practice of the townspeople to elect the same person to the single offices year after year. For example, the town has made no change in Moderator, Town Treasurer, Tax Collector, Tree Warden and Town Accountant in the last ten years. The same person held the position of Town Clerk for many more years than that.

On the whole, this is probably a wise policy for two reasons. First, the duties of the single offices are usually specific, and often detailed. To change officers each year would merely result in confusion and a lack of continuity of practice. When a person keeps records for a long period of time, he develops a system which he uses year after year. To change these officers frequently would mean the use of many different systems. Second, the townspeople will get better service to keep people in office over a period of years. When one desires information one can get it because in most cases that officer handled it. Further, single offices have no way of setting up long time practices and seeing to it that they are carried out except by returning the same people to office year after year.

#### 1. THE MODERATOR

The Moderator is annually elected to office. His duties are to preside over the town meetings. He is the person who calls the meeting to order and sees that the town business is carried forward in an orderly way. He puts all questions to vote. He determines when people are entitled to the floor, and when they are out of order.

To qualify for the position as Moderator one should have a thorough knowledge of how to conduct the Town Meeting. He must be familiar with the Town's By-Laws for they contain many of the important parliamentary rules by which our meetings are conducted. He must also be familiar with Cushing's Manual on parliamentary procedure. He must be a person of good judgment and have an understanding of the feelings and reactions of large groups of people. He must approach his task as one of a true presiding officer who will give all an opportunity to speak, yet who himself is not anxious to jam some project through, or to prevent other projects from going through.

## 2. THE OFFICE OF TOWN CLERK

The office of Town Clerk was probably one of the very earliest of offices established. On December 21, 1649 William Cowdrey was chosen clerk of writs. This seems likely to have been the beginning of the position of Town Clerk, just five years after the petition to establish Reading had been granted.

The duties of the clerk of writs were to keep an accurate record of the proceedings in the town meetings. This has been done, as complete records are available back to the very founding of our town in 1644.

As the years went on more and more duties were added to the office of Town Clerk, partly because there was no other office to conveniently care for them. To-day he has a whole host of duties, ranging greatly in scope.

### *Duties*

The Town Clerk today has the following duties:

1. He shall keep a record of all votes passed at town meetings at which he is elected, and all other town meetings during his term of office.
2. He shall issue many kinds of licenses: marriage, dog, hunting and fishing, etc.

3. He shall carry out certain election duties such as:

- a. Make a record of the ballot box totals during elections.
- b. Announce in open meeting the results of the election.
- c. Send to the Secretary of State in Boston a record of votes for offices within four days after election.
- d. Send out and record the ballots of all absentee voters.
- e. Have charge of printing the ballots for the annual town election.

4. Many miscellaneous duties such as:

- a. Administer oath of office to all town officers who apply to him to be sworn in, and he shall make a record of it. He shall also make a record of other officers who may be sworn in by a justice of peace.
- b. All town officers who are required to file a bond must file it with the Town Clerk, who in turn files his bond with the Selectmen.
- c. To keep a record of mortgages of personal property.
- d. To place on file reports of town committees.
- e. To make and keep an index of all papers which are required by law to be recorded.
- f. To keep a record of all telephone and electric pole locations, and a record of all underground conduits.
- g. To have the care of all other public records of the town of which he is clerk.

- h. To have the care of every original paper belonging to the file of any town bearing a date earlier than 1800. Every other paper must be kept seven years after the latest original entry unless otherwise provided by law.
- i. To keep a record of any rule or record passed by any town board that provides for a penalty. These must be filed with the Town Clerk within ten days.
- j. To keep a record of births, marriages, and deaths in the town.
- k. To post at least five notices of civil service examinations which are sent out by the Commissioner of Civil Service.
- l. He must notify the prison commissioners of the name of the Chief of Police.
- m. To receive applications of dentists to practice dentistry in Reading.
- n. To notify the Town Accountant or Treasurer whenever a vote or an order has been passed by the town appropriating money.
- o. To act as clerk of the Registrars who have charge of registration of voters and printing the street list.
- p. To attend the drawing of jurors by the Selectmen.

### 3. TAX COLLECTOR

In the very earliest of our town's days there was no tax collector. During the very first years there were no levies of any kind. The first tax levy was for the support of the minister. The minister was not paid in money, but in produce. He was given a house in which to live. The various members of the church paid their dues by bringing to him so many pounds of wheat, corn, potatoes, and meat. They brought him wood to burn.

Thus was he paid. It happens that people in those days were not much different than the people of today, because some of the members were not bringing their share of supplies. The result was that there was appointed a man to see that all the church members brought in the minister's "rate." That person was probably properly called the first tax collector in Reading.

As the years went on the minister's salary was paid in part by goods and in part by money. It was still necessary to have a man look after the collections. Finally, in 1705 it was voted that from that day forward the minister should receive his pay in lawful money.

As with the church, so with other matters in the town. It was about this time that a school master was employed. Roads began to be maintained. Gradually the money affairs became so numerous that someone had to look after them. The town elected a treasurer, and it was his duty not only to pay out money, but to see that it was collected. Such was the arrangement for many years. Today, however, we have a full time position of tax collector who is annually elected by the townspeople.

### *Duties*

The tax collector has the following duties which are small in number, but are great in detail.

1. To send out all bills for poll taxes, excise taxes, and real estate taxes.
2. To send out all notices of sewer rentals. The information is secured from the Board of Public Works.
3. To take in payments for taxes and give receipts for them.
4. To deposit the receipts from taxes and other sources to the Town of Reading.
5. To notify the Treasurer of all foreclosures.
6. People who fail to pay their taxes are called delinquent tax payers. Their property may be taken over by the town to pay for the taxes.

This usually happens after two years of not paying taxes. The tax collector sees to the advertising of the notices that certain properties will be sold at auction for the taxes if not paid. This is required by law.

People seeking this office should be able to keep accurate and detailed records. They must be willing to spend their full time at the job. The work means a lot of detail and regular hours at the office. The person should be strictly honest and of strong character. They must be willing to push cases and bring the delinquent tax payers to the point of bringing the money in to the town. Otherwise the town will find it necessary to borrow money.

#### 4. TOWN TREASURER

The early history of the Town Treasurer goes back to the early days. A Town Treasurer has regularly been chosen since 1712. Today the Treasurer is annually elected to his position.

##### *Duties*

The duties of the Town Treasurer are:

1. To receive and take charge of all money belonging to the town, and to pay over and account for the same according to the order of the town or of its officers. No other person shall pay any bill of any department.
2. He must give a \$45,000 bond, the expense of which is paid by the town.
3. He must make out the pay roll. Weekly pay rolls are usually paid in cash, while others are paid by check. He also pays out all Old Age Assistance checks.
4. He is ex-officio a member of the Commissioners of Trust Funds.
5. He is a member of the Insurance Committee.



The Town Treasurer writes about 1200 checks each month. He has a machine which enables him to sign in twenty minutes as many checks as he could sign by long hand in an hour and a half.

The Town Treasurer also makes all financial arrangements for bond issues, or borrowing money on temporary loan notes.

This position is a responsible, detailed position. It is not a full time job, yet it occupies a lot of time. Needless to say, all books must balance.

## 5. TREE WARDEN

The office of Tree Warden is annually elected by vote of the townspeople. The duties of the Tree Warden are to supervise the work and care of the town forests. In Reading the Moth Superintendent, Tree Warden and member of the Forest Committee are all the same person, except the Forest Committee has two other members. The duties of all these positions has to do with keeping the shade trees of the town in good order, and to see to it that the Town Forest is kept clean and on an orderly basis.

## 6. THE W. P. A. SPONSOR'S AGENT

### *History*

This is the newest official position in the town government. It began its existence in November 1935. Beginning in 1930 and 1931 there began to develop a real unemployment problem throughout the country. Reading, like all other towns, was hit. At first, this meant some increase in the cost of the department of Public Welfare under the heading of general relief. Most of the costs of this item were met entirely by local taxation.

A year or two later the federal government decided to make it possible to assist towns by granting them money with which to carry on projects. This would give employment to those who were temporarily out of work. In 1933 was organized the Civil Works Adminis-

tration, the beginning of the federal government program. The job of approving all of the projects fell to the Board of Selectmen. The next year it changed to the Emergency Relief Act, E. R. A., which did practically the same work. Finally, in November 1935 the Works Progress Administration was organized, popularly known as W. P. A. At this time the Selectmen appointed a man whose title was W. P. A. Sponsor's Agent, whose duty it was to have charge of this work. This set up has continued ever since.

The Sponsor's Agent is annually appointed by the Selectmen to assume the administrative responsibility of the work of the W. P. A. He makes a weekly report to the Selectmen. If any new projects are ready to be approved by the Selectmen he gets their approval. The Selectmen are still final local authority on local projects.

### *Duties of the W. P. A. Sponsor*

What does the Sponsor's Agent himself do?

1. He writes up the details of all projects and submits them to the Selectmen for approval, later to the Federal Government for approval. This is no small job for very accurate estimates must be given of cost of labor; of all materials, and a detailed plan of the work of the project.
2. In order to carry on this work, he must be responsible for all surveys and plans. Most of these he carries out himself.
3. He must supervise the actual work on the various projects. He must see that this work meets a weekly schedule so that the project will be completed within the time schedule turned in and within the federal allotment of money.
4. He makes all purchases of materials. Materials costing over three hundred dollars are purchased on bid.

5. He fills out all the weekly, monthly and other forms required. Since there are some fifteen separate forms this is a time consuming task, yet it must be done to meet the federal requirements to get the money.
6. He is the officer who represents to the town in all W. P. A. work. If any federal supervisor has any suggestions or complaints, he talks with the W. P. A. Sponsor.
6. He is the officer who represents the town in meet the federal regulations. This is so that if one project is finished up that there will be another for the men to go to work on.

To meet the federal requirements the town must furnish all the materials of work. The federal government pays all the labor costs. Yet at the same time the town costs must equal at least twenty-five per cent of the total costs.

Just how much has the W. P. A. meant to Reading? Following are figures which indicate federal expenditures of money and local expenditures on local projects.

*Town and Federal Allotments for W. P. A.*

Year	Federal Cash	Federal Food and Clothing	Cost to Town
*1933 through			
*1935	\$ 585,867.00	\$ 66,457.00	
1936	228,347.00	35,591.00	
1937	89,992.52	39,047.43	\$ 25,919.12
1938	157,940.63	27,122.21	38,194.63
1939	178,624.20	27,482.52	41,898.25
**1940	160,000.00	30,000.00	30,000.00
Totals	\$1,400,771.35	\$225,700.16	\$136,012.00

\*The total expenditures by the Federal Government from 1933 through 1935.

\*\*Estimated.

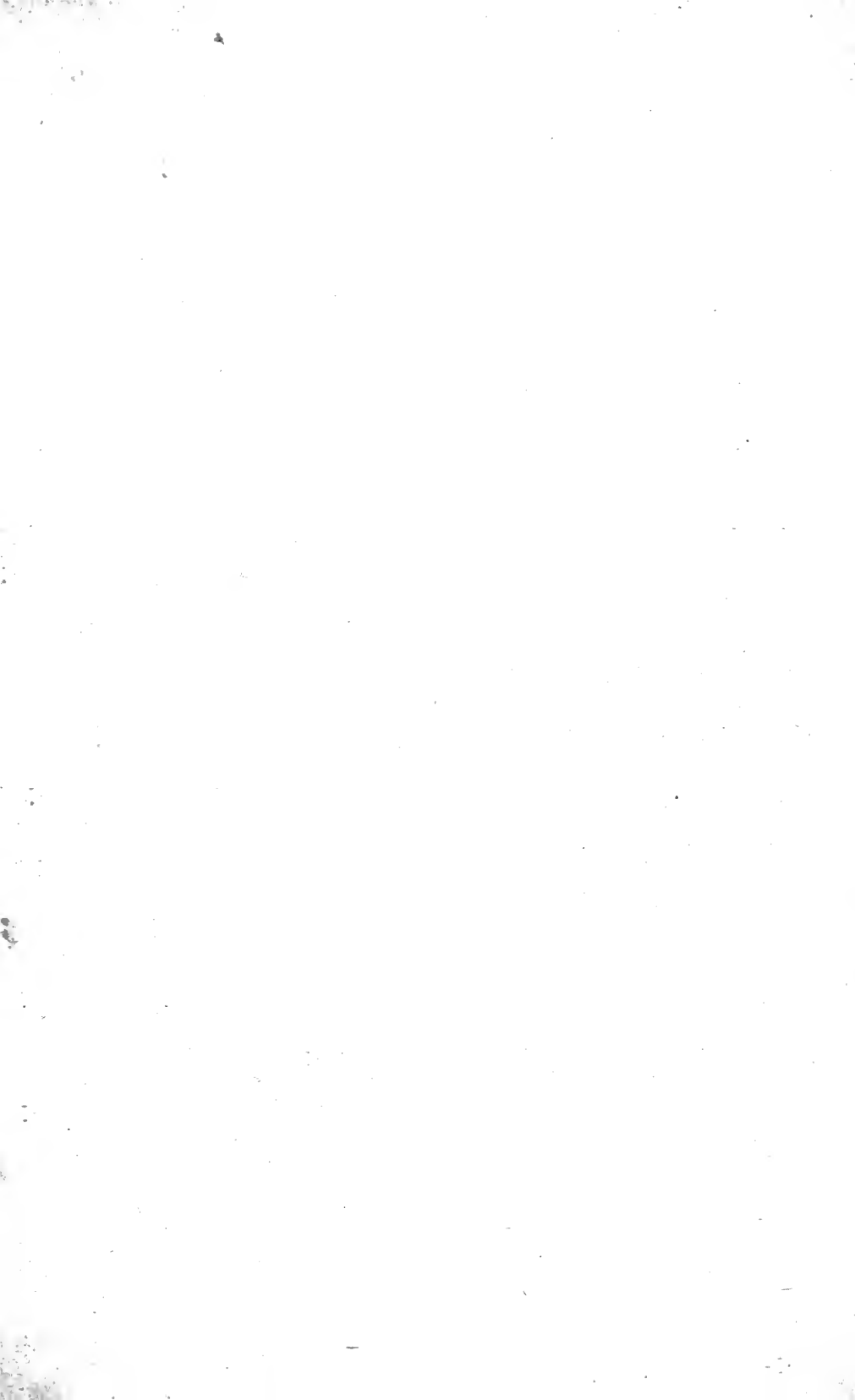
Thus we see that the town has received from the Federal Government actual grants totaling in eight years more than one million four hundred thousand dollars. In addition we have received food and clothing to the value of a quarter of a million dollars. This has been available to the town at a relatively small cost, \$136,012.00.

What has actually been done with the money? First, the Forest Glen Cemetery has been developed which will have a lot value of \$314,000 at a cost of only \$25,000. The Pearl Street School grounds have been graded and developed. The Washington Street playground has been improved. The Birch Meadow area has had many improvements. Many of the school buildings have been painted inside and out. Since 1934 a regular planned program of recreation for young people has been carried out. The Planning Board now has available a fine detailed topographic map of Reading which is twelve feet high and eight feet wide. A road has been built into the Town Forest. The facts and records of our town history and our vital statistics have been copied. A toy and repair shop has been run. These and many more things have been accomplished by the W. P. A. program.

### *Summary*

Thus we see that many of the necessary details of the town's affairs are carried out by single officers who are either elected or appointed to office. The policy of the townspeople seems to be to retain these people in office over a long period of years, so as to maintain familiarity with and continuity in the work to be done.

The End





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